

**SOLVING THE UNSOLVABLE:
Western Responses to Otherness from Saint Augustine**

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Abstract

Theodor Adorno's writings on the interdependence of subject and object provided the impetus for this project. Following Adorno the work argues that agency comes from an awareness of the limitations of one's conception of the world and more generally of the existence of an external world beyond human determinations. In order to avoid the pitfalls of an unintelligible jargon through an abstract discussion that runs the risk of becoming esoteric, I then looks at concrete examples, instances in the past, of individuals struggling to find what they took to be an authentic subjectivity and, intertwined with this, a means of coming to terms with otherness. At the same time, I attempt to show by way of these examples—the point of origin for what I take to be ideologies that sought to eliminate the place for the subject. My intention is to examine the genesis of the Western expectation that otherness was something ephemeral, or illusory, something that could be definitively overcome. By virtue of the interdependence of subject and object, and in turn of agency as a product of the recognition of the non-identical, I argue that it is by tracing this moment and its implications that one can also find the starting point for, and thus have a better understanding of, contemporary attempts to eliminate, or constrain, the subject. As with Adorno's negative dialectics I want to clear a path to otherness through showing the failure of man's conceptions, but in this case through showing the failures of man's conceptions of himself rather than the failures of his conceptions of the external world.

It is my contention that Saint Augustine's theology, with his City of God especially as its culmination, present a kind of threshold for this kind of thinking, a point at which the wave of humility before the object and doubts about man's place in the universe and his destiny, that perhaps prior to him had risen and fallen, finally broke and never rolled back. Every component of his thought was geared toward not simply transcending but definitively solving otherness. Augustine envisioned human beings as actually responsible for non-identity's existence and so as capable of doing away with it through orientating their action in such a way as to remedy the primordial error that was its cause. Paradoxically for Augustine it was agency itself that was the problem, man's self assertion had caused him to fall away from his divine nature, yet the error that accompanied Adam's agency could be cancelled out by obedient human action. Totality, obedience, and man as the cause of otherness were interlinked, inextricable elements of his approach. Following the discussion of Augustine's theology I proceed to examine the origins

and characteristics of three other transformative ideologies or worldviews in Western history; the idealistic, the social, and the transcendental of Francesco Petrarch, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Arthur de Gobineau respectively. The crux of my argument is that the unique characteristics of Augustine's search for certainty created a sort of sure and stable foundation on which later ideologies which restricted the subject, so as to solve non-identity, could build and flourish. I show how each stemmed from individual attempts to come to terms with the otherness that overshadows human existence by putting forth definitive answers to the question of what man is.

By contrasting the figures I then show, in the conclusion of this work, that Augustine's approach while powerful and reassuring was ultimately self-destructive. This is because Augustine's monolithic conception of human nature limited man's ability to appreciate and work with otherness and at the same time it created an expectation that human understanding should ultimately be error free. As becomes clear at the end of the project, the restriction of agency to contend with non-identity ultimately had the effect of eliminating non-identity itself. Reality came increasingly to be perceived as mundane and self-evident as the importance attributed to the subject diminished in the later figures, thereby demonstrating by way of example the interdependence of the two as Adorno argued. While the works examined constitute a niche in intellectual history it is nonetheless a highly influential one. This dissertation, at the very least, identifies an approach to non-identity and a conception of the subject that was a counterpart, perhaps even a predecessor or progenitor, to the rationality that predominates in modernity and which the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School criticized so vociferously.

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Introduction

To each and all the course of life abounds with disappointment and inner strife. No one can deny the sense of a pervasive impenetrability that surrounds even the most mundane of actions. Like a shadow accompanying him for all time, otherness—a lack of understanding—seems to be man's primary and permanent affliction. Yet the worst that man has to offer—much worse indeed than anything done to him by nature—occurs when he fools himself into believing that otherness is not present, when he falls prey to the illusion that he has the measure of this vast and incomprehensible expanse. This work is an attempt to explain that moment. It seeks to examine how otherness and its consequences have been neglected. Further, it will demonstrate that a cognizance of otherness—humility before the world as something exceeding our conceptions—is not only a moral imperative, but also the basis of the self, or agency, itself. Above all it will not subscribe to the view that upholding a respect for difference, for that which is beyond one's understanding, necessitates a denial of a human connection to an external world, and by extension, a denial of subjectivity. Indeed, the starting point for this project was precisely opposition to this view of man as a being so passive and so incapacitated, who perhaps alone of all creatures can have a sense of the deficiency of his ideas but can do nothing with it. What follows is firmly a product of longstanding approaches to otherness in critical theory that have tried to create a space to allow externality to "speak" to men by linking epistemology to ethics, subject to object, but, I believe, goes beyond them.

Instrumental Rationality and the Subject

The focus of the theorists of the Frankfurt School, whose writings are the essential bases of this project, is modernity, specifically its destruction or denial of a place for agency and its lack of respect for the inherent otherness of the world beyond man's conceptions. For them, modernity, through its emphasis on a method of understanding that acknowledged only what was liable to repetition, prediction, and calculation, made what Marx described as fetishization, the creation of fixed notions about reality, the elevation of man's mental conceptions of the world over man himself, itself into a fetish (Adorno; Horkheimer 1987: 17). Driven by fear and anxiety modern man, in his attempt to make the world definitively known, to eliminate what he

does not know, turned the mythic fear of uncertainty "radical." It made what myth had tried to do to relieve people of fear, its attempt to impose a permanent framework on a world whose complexity inevitably exceeded its bounds, itself into the conscious objective of the system. Adorno and Horkheimer, of course, explored this type of thinking in their famous work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Modern rationality had become for them a myth accepted uncritically and blindly (Adorno; Horkheimer 1987: 23). Drawing on Max Weber examination of what he termed instrumental rationality, they argued that the kind of rationality that predominated in the scientific method had extended itself beyond the sciences to become a truly "societal-level" phenomenon. They saw the capitalist economy's reliance on a calculative reason, both in the division of labour that produces its good and through the commodification that sets them in order to create fixed notions about products for public consumption, as rendering men little more than cogs in a vast machine. Intertwined with this was of course the appearance of bureaucratic state structures throughout the industrialized world that depended on rules and calculation. All of the diverse components of this rationality, then, had, for Adorno and Horkheimer, come to reinforce one another through possessing a shared orientation that tended toward dehumanization.¹ The false confidence that resulted from this type of thought froze it, they argued, and led people to blindly apply their own ideas uncritically to nature and even to other human beings as if they were inanimate objects. It made men into the very things which this ideology purports to control.²

Like the oarsmen in the Odysseus myth who row unceasingly with ears plugged with wax, incapable of hearing a call for anything different in life, so for the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School modern man had too become deaf to his own need for subjectivity and to the disastrous consequences of its absence for human existence. He had fallen into the trap of a dehumanizing objectivism which, through its removal of his own agency, had rendered subjectivity little more than a passive appendage to a system of domination. Man had sacrificed himself, become alienated from himself, for an increase in control over the natural world whose

¹ In Adorno and Horkheimer's words, "the restriction of thought to organization and administration, practised by rulers from the cunning Odysseus to the managing directors of today, necessarily implies the restriction which comes upon the great as soon as it is no longer merely a question of manipulating the small" (Adorno; Horkheimer 1987: 36). As Lambert Zuidervaat writes, "the culmination of this process is an empty adopted subjectivity which has lost the very autonomy for whose sake the conquest of nature was initiated" (Zuidervaat 1991: 161).

² In a true objective materialism, as Walter Benjamin asserted before them, the object would not be taken for granted but given the dignity that it deserved through the recognition that it has an autonomy fundamentally outside of human conceptions (Adorno 2000: 27).

power was superficially much greater, but whose operations no longer reflected his own needs. At the same time modern rationality had obscured the capacity to truly work with externality by selling it short, by confining it too, like man himself, solely within the dictates of what the system of inquiry thought legitimate. In its desire to seek complete explanation and to offer reliable information, modernity simply excluded as meaningless what was not susceptible to its methods (Adorno; Horkheimer 1987: 13). It dismissed as irrational what it could not encompass through the limits of its method, forgot about the inherent limitations of any man made system of thought to fully grasp the world, because of its underpinning in a particular sociohistorical circumstance, and remained oblivious to the need to change itself to accommodate the contradictions that human constructs must contend with because of their partial nature. But an escape from the alienating tendencies of the instrumental rationality of modern life could not come for the theorists of the Frankfurt School through the positing of some sort of autonomous subjectivity. For them any theory whether objectivist or idealist, which sought either to rely exclusively on an ability to know reality objectively or to construct reality through a constituting subject as a way out of modernity's dead ends, that concentrated on one to the detriment of the other,³ would only serve to replicate the status quo by reinforcing contemporary dehumanizations.⁴

Adorno, of course, accepted the reality of ontology, it was clear to him that the idealist notion of a human capacity to stand above the world was an illusion, and that consequently the object was primary, in the sense that man as a subject could not be conceived of in abstraction. "Potentially, though not actually, objectivity can be conceived without a subject; but not likewise object without subjectivity. No matter how subject is defined, the existent being cannot be conjured away from it. If subject is not something, and 'something' designates an irreducibly objective element, then it is nothing at all; even as *actus purus* it needs to refer to something that acts" (Adorno 2005: 249-250). There could be no human consciousness, for Adorno, without

³ "The ideal of depersonalizing knowledge for the sake of objectivity retains nothing but the *caput mortuum* of objectivity. If the dialectical primacy of the object is acknowledged, then the hypothesis of an unreflected practical science of the object as a residual determination after the subject has been subtracted away collapses. Subject is then no longer a subtractible addendum to objectivity. With the removal of one of its essential moments objectivity is falsified, not purified. The notion that guides the residual concept of objectivity has, then, its archetype in something posited and man-made" (Adorno 2005: 235).

⁴ As he writes, "the separation is manifested in their being mutually mediated, object by subject, and even more and differently, subject by object. As soon as it is fixed without mediation, the separation becomes ideology, its normal form... Once radically separated from the object, subject reduces the object to itself" (Adorno 2005: 246).

"something," the subject is inconceivable without an object, even a subject composed of "nothing" would still be something. Thus a blank slate in the idealist sense is impossible (Adorno 1990: 173). Yet Adorno, likewise, claimed that it was the reality that human consciousness was structured by sociohistorical conceptions of the world that could fail, that man is a result not an essence, that man is a product of engaging with objects and one himself in a sense, which in turn demonstrated the importance of the subject for the object.

This is because if it is accepted that our consciousness is structured *a priori* of our own involvement with the world, and if this is a dynamic process, this implies that it must be mediated, since we do not grasp the object in the immediate sense, seeing everything reality presents us with at once, but live within our own conceptions. The object, the ontological, becomes something only through being determinate "in the conditionedness of what conditions the object" (Adorno 2005: 251), as opposed to simply that which "is," everything in existence in its particularity. Removing the subject would render the object nothing, as having nothing to condition. Reified conceptions which try to construct universal concepts thus could not exist without a subject sorting amongst what the objective world presents it with (Adorno 1990: 183). Once it is realized that the object is primary, in other words, a subject is required. When the theorist acknowledges that people do not live in an immediacy, but that they have certain conceptions of the world that structure their lives and are in no way self-evident from physiology, you need a subject because these conceptions could not arise but through mediation by the subject via the translation of particulars into universals (Adorno 1990: 186). There could be no Being or discourse without the subjective ability to discriminate between and use these concepts as derived from the objective material. As Adorno writes of the subject, "it is ineradicable. Upon the elimination of the subjective moment the object would come apart diffusely like the fleeting stirrings and twinklings of subjective life. Object, though attenuated, also is not without subject. If object itself lacked subject as a moment, then its objectivity would become nonsense" (Adorno 2005: 257).

No physical sensation alone or classification of it could ever lead, for example, to the ontological human idea of the female or male sex with all their layers of meaning. As an alternative to this, all that could be described as "natural" in such an instance, in the absence of something like a subject capable of taking an emergent meaning out of what exists, would be the feeling of soft or hard, a scent or posture that triggers an instinctual reaction, an immediacy, in

other words, without any capacity to recognise the existence of the objective world itself. The subject then is made up of what it takes from the object, i.e. the partial knowledge of externality which is ontology, yet the objective world as something capable of being "known" as opposed to the immediacy of that which simply "is" necessitates the intervention of a subject capable of acknowledging it.⁵ "For object becomes something at all only through being determinate" (Adorno 2005: 250).⁶

Agency and Otherness

Adorno's demonstration of the interdependence of subject and object was meant to clear a space for the recognition that man's ontology, his conception of the world, and at the same time his subjective impression of it, never touched reality as it was. Because the object as man knows

⁵ Following Adorno, I would argue here, in the same vein, that the meaning behind concepts is also combinatory and never the extent of a physical situation in the immediate sense and in this respect, for example, when we see a woman and link her body to the fertility of nature, we are conceptualizing woman in terms of our idea of trees, grass, and the earth itself. When we think in this way, we are associating and even discarding diverse elements of our experience to form ideas; we are using combinations of concepts to describe the world which never touch its actual particularity. It is clear, in this light, that a subject is involved in some capacity in this also, because this kind of selective association and its continuation in time would have to take place, and in the same way have their point of origin, within the mind of a person, i.e. subjectively, to occur at all. The concept of woman can likewise be related to man, which can in turn be related to children, home, city, country, government and to every other concept indefinitely. And each of these associations with woman can potentially be related to every other, with all the new associations thus formed through this linking then in turn themselves relatable to all others in new ways, even those from which they first arose, in a seemingly never ending and proliferating interconnected chain of meaning. This is another reason, because the associations between concepts are "infinite" in their true meaning and definition if left to their own devices and thus unusable as concepts at all, that the origin of concepts and their ongoing use, must stem from a subjective act of human intervention capable of interceding in this infinity and creating a parallel world of subjective meaning as it were, using concepts, paradoxically, by not actually knowing the full extent of what they entail.

Thus by virtue of their generality and dependence on a cultural context human thought does not have the capacity to correspond to the flux of the world, the chaotic action and reaction of everything in existence. There is no means of seeing the physical world as it is in all its depth. And for this reason "there is no peeping out. What would lie in the beyond makes its appearance only in the materials and categories within" (Adorno 1990: 140). Human thought, clearly also transcends—in its complexity, communicability, and composition—anything that could be the result of an individual's own invention or idiosyncratic interaction with the world. Thus ontology entirely make up the sociological sea in which all human beings swim. Otherwise, barring the belief in a naive realism that, on the one hand, rejects the reality of culture and, on the other, even of concepts themselves through presupposing the perfect correspondence of thought with its object, human understanding would only be of the most basic kind, if it could be constructed at all, and entirely restricted to what an individual could conceive of solely within the confines of his own experience.

⁶ The object is therefore dependent on the subject, "The primacy of the object means rather that subject for its part is object in a qualitatively different, more radical sense than object, because object cannot be known except through consciousness, hence is also subject... If one wants to attain the object, however, then its subjective determinations or qualities are not to be eliminated: precisely that would be contrary to the primacy of the object. If subject has a core of object, then the subjective qualities in the object are all the more an objective moment" (Adorno 2005: 250).

it through his concepts relies on the subject, it will at best only capture reality in an inevitably partial sense that abstracts, falsely, from the larger whole, and likewise because subject is conditioned by object, sociohistorical circumstance, it can never hope to rise above its own determinedness to see the world as it in fact is. And thus if subject and object were recognized to be co-dependent then a space was cleared to indicate the existence of what Adorno termed "non-identity," that which is left behind because of the inability of thought to accommodate its object, i.e. objective reality, the perception of otherness beyond the self and its conception of the world, including even perhaps the way thought is understood by itself.⁷

Enlightenment thinking had emphasized a coercive control over externality that seemed to offer the promise of the mastery of nature.⁸ But even this control was itself ultimately an illusion because objective reality had only become more controllable in the most superficial sense. Without a means of appreciating otherness, man's knowledge of the object world itself became more blinkered. Modern man had fooled himself into believing that he had captured the world as it is, but had done so only through selling it short, i.e. by only acknowledging that portion of externality that conformed to his expectations.⁹ Likewise through equating agency with control, or the ability to have a definitive picture of reality and so intervene in the world in order to make it serve man's own ends, modern man had imprisoned his own subjectivity within the confines of what the "system" or determinants of modern rationality considered legitimate. The failure of modernity to realize this could only result in a slavery to abstraction that ultimately destroyed the ability to even conceive of difference, a freezing and stultification of thought with nothing left standing but a naked objectivism. And in a vicious circle as enlightenment thinking relentlessly pushed forward and extended itself throughout modern society, its growth foreclosed possibilities for engaging with otherness outside of its imperatives

⁷ While for Hegel "the real was the rational," thought could eventually come to perfectly define its object, Adorno's theory is premised on the belief that the actual state of the world could never be expressed rationally. For Adorno, in a sense, the real is irrational, meaning the acknowledgment that the world cannot be expressed by human beings as it is, is the only form of thinking that can be called enlightened (Adorno 1990: 144). As he writes, "the name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. Contradiction is not what Hegel's absolute idealism was bound to transfigure it into... It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived" (Adorno 1990: 5).

⁸ "The principle of progressive rationality, contains an internal conflict... this kind of rationality exists only in so far as it can subjugate something different from and alien to itself. We can put it even more strongly: it can exist only by identifying everything that is caught up in its machinery, by levelling it and by defining it in its alterity as something that resists it and, we may even go so far as to say, something that is hostile to it" (Adorno 2006: 14).

⁹ "This domination of nature was not self-reflective but asserted its control over its so-called materials by subsuming, classifying, subordinating and otherwise cutting them short" (Adorno 2006: 13).

and expectations thereby limiting any opportunity for agency and so for escaping instrumental rationality's dictates.¹⁰

While the conception of agency that predominated in the modern world, then, saw it falsely as simply a matter of control, Adorno offered a very different notion of what agency would consist. In contrast to modernity's race to the bottom in thought and activity, Adorno argued that human beings possessed a distinct capacity for meaningful experience that could counter the degrading reifications of identity thinking.¹¹ Since the subject when he believes he acts according to his own volition, is really only reproducing the dictates of a reified system, it is only through activity which permits the subject, either implicitly or explicitly, to appreciate their dependence on the ontological determinations of the object, and so of their inability to actually grasp it "as it is"—to appreciate the world's otherness, its existence beyond the self, its mystery—that a space for agency can be found. This is why Adorno writes that the "Subject is all the more the less it is, and all the less the more it believes itself to exist, to be for itself something objective" (Adorno 2005: 257).¹²

Before Adorno, at the very beginning of critical theory, Kant put forth the unknowable *noumena*, the *Ding an sich*, an otherness inextricably beyond human comprehension as central component of his theory of perception and understanding. For him totality only existed in the mind. An inability to know nature was the very precondition of thought. In the faculties of taste and genius as outlined the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant built a bridge for man to appreciate otherness without capturing it or assigning it a particular end or human purpose. This "purposiveness without a purpose," is what allowed him to tie his whole epistemological and ethical program together. Nietzsche's philosophy too, in a very different way, can be seen as an attempt to change man's conception of himself and of his own activity through drawing on a nature that always exceeds the bounds of human determinations. Through the recognition that externality had no purpose or meaning, and that its complexity vastly exceeds the

¹⁰ This why Adorno states that we can speak of progress only to extent of moving from the slingshot to megaton bomb.

¹¹ They wanted to "use the force of the subject" as Adorno put it to break through the deceptions of the constituting subject of idealism to show that it was the unique ability to acknowledge otherness that was at the heart of human freedom (Adorno 1990: XX).

¹² It is especially in moments of subjective insight or meaning, because the subject is literally a creation of the awareness of the non-identical, that Adorno believed a place for respecting the otherness of the object could be found. This is what he means when he writes that, "Knowledge of the object is brought closer by the act of the subject rending the veil it weaves about the object. It can do this only when, passive, without anxiety, it entrusts itself to its own experience."

objectifications of the human mind, Nietzsche wanted man to realize that he is a part of a natural world whose infinite capacity for creativity mirrors his own. The Will to Power was, for Nietzsche, the ability to understand that man's understanding of the world was exclusively one of his own creation, since it could never touch reality but merely interpret it, and from this nihilistic idea to seize a hidden strength, to comprehend the perhaps unique human capacity to construct and live in meanings of our own creation. For Nietzsche then, as for Kant, man's distinct potential, or advantage, in nature, the quality of his mind which made him in fact a human being at all, was precisely his inability to ever know the world as it really is.

Adorno built on the ideas of Kant and Nietzsche with his philosophy of "negative dialectics." It was meant to be a history of the disservice that the subject had done to the object and to itself, to its own agency, by forgetting the interdependence of subject and object and so the reality of an external world beyond man's own determinations.¹³ It would seek to demonstrate that the attempt to make thought self-sufficient could only result in its stultification and so to its vulnerability to its own contradictions and blind spots (Huhn and Zuidervaart 1999: 178-179). The emphasis on contradiction and hidden social antagonism points to Adorno's belief that, owing to man's dependence on ontology, the only way to "break out" of the identity which dominated modernity, the attempt to make thought equal to its object, was through becoming aware of its failures, through the failures of identity thinking itself.¹⁴ It was in these spaces of contradiction that Adorno believed the truth of reality, that is to say the "semblance" of the non-identical, of the world beyond one's own determinations, could be detected.¹⁵ It was in this way that the non-identical was indirectly permitted to "speak" to man.¹⁶ This is one of the

¹³ And in this sense Adorno's philosophy should be understood not as a reflection on the thing as such but on the "social limitations of knowledge" which prevent people from ever perceiving the world as it is (Huhn and Zuidervaart 1999: 131)

¹⁴ "The contradiction is the nonidentical under the aspect of identity; the primacy of the principle of contradiction in dialectics tests the heterogeneous according to unitary thought. By colliding with its own boundary, unitary thought surpasses itself. Dialectics is the consistent consciousness of non-identity" (Adorno 1990: 5).

¹⁵ "Were speculation concerning the state of reconciliation allowed, then it would be impossible to conceive that state as either the undifferentiated unity of subject and object or their hostile antithesis: rather it would be the communication of what is differentiated... The present concept is so shameful because it betrays what is best - the potential for agreement between human beings and things - to the idea of imparting information between subject according to the exigencies of subjective reason. In its proper place, even epistemologically, the relationship of subject and object would lie in a peace achieved between human beings as well as between them and their Other. Peace is the state of differentiation without domination, with the differentiated participating in each other" (Adorno 2005: 247).

¹⁶ As Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia*, the only advantage for man "is insight into his entanglement, and the infinitesimal freedom that lies in (this) knowledge as such" (Adorno 1974: 26). Adorno even speculated that the subject of idealism, perhaps he would have also said this of postmodernism's focus on discourse, was a transposition

reasons why Adorno never lost his interest in human freedom, because he believed that it was in this pursuit of freedom, which echoed the existence of the inextricable otherness beyond human conceptions, that the promise of breaking the spell of identity thinking resided.¹⁷

Adorno, building on Kant's own examination of aesthetics and in order to complement his more rationalist critical approach in *Negative Dialectics*, likewise argued that it was in art's power to appear to convey an essence that was beyond the sum of its parts, to have a meaning that was seemingly beyond the effort put into the artwork, that another means of the appreciation of otherness resided. Adorno viewed art as not only enabling the subject to critique circumstances but also to creatively move beyond the constraints of existing meaning through artistic mediation. A mentality that questions the claim by identity thinking to encompass, or reflect, the totality of what exists, as in *Negative Dialectics*, creates a space for the new, aesthetics, by shocking us out of the complacency of taken for granted meaning. This in turn opens the door to enable art to create new conceptions. As with his discussion of the ontological subject above, art's claim to meaning for Adorno, as Jarvis suggests, "is illusory because works of art would be nothing at all without the empirical elements of which they are made up" (Jarvis 1998: 102). However, this illusion is not entirely false; it also contains truth not only because the effect it produces on the subject's mind does in fact occur but also because, as Adorno writes, it is "the illusion of the illusionless." The "illusionless" here refers to the semblance of non-identity, the otherness of objective reality beyond the subject's own understanding. As with the subject coming to realize through contradiction that they are conditioned by ontology, that their thought does not correspond to the world as it is, and thus that otherness exists, so art, Adorno argued, by virtue of its ability to convey a sense of singularity—that it exists in a world in which it is the exemplary member, that it does not appear to simply be the sum of its parts, that it seems to have an essence or aura all its own, that it appears to be more than what it in fact is, even if an illusion—nevertheless points to a higher truth that humans alone seem to possess: that the world

of the agency, or freedom, that man perceives in his experience of non-identity onto himself.. "Idealism takes the idea of the correct life and wrongly projects it inward. The subject as productive imagination, pure apperception, ultimately as free action, enciphers that activity in which the life of people actually reproduces itself, and with good reason anticipates in it freedom... Subject in its self-positing is semblance and at the same time something historically exceedingly real. It contains the potential for the sublation of its own domination" (Adorno 2005: 256).

¹⁷ "Once this is seen through, then a consciousness objectified to itself, and precisely as such directed outward, virtually striking outward, could no longer be dragged along without self-reflection. The turn to the subject, though from the outset intent on its primacy, does not simply disappear with its revision; this revision occurs not least of all in the subjective interest in freedom" (Adorno 2005: 249).

as ordinarily viewed by identity thinking, by our own determinations, can be more than what we thought it was. Aesthetic experience, especially in the modern world where art has become useless and so outside of the system of domination, thus contains a latent recognition that our understanding does not constitute the limit of reality, that there is something beyond the confines in which human thought is usually immersed, and so a place for agency.

And it is finding the place for otherness, and by implication its neglect or absence from contemporary society, that is at the very center of the problem that this work sets out to address. Drawing on the pre-eminence that Adorno attaches to non-identity in human experience through his examination of the degradation engendered by the modern world, this work will argue that a genuine existence, agency, can only come through perception of the non-identical, whether in critique or aesthetic experience, and consequently that to find agency one must find otherness. It will endeavour to locate a subjective ability to perceive the existence of the otherness of the world beyond the self and the consequent cognitive strength and pleasure that can be drawn from this awareness.¹⁸ The subject here again, is not something to be eliminated, but emphasized, because of the indispensable role that it plays in the perpetuation and conceivably in the origin of ontology itself given its unnaturalness.

History and Otherness

Following Walter Benjamin's conception of history to an extent, I make the claim that historical consciousness is not merely a source of the recognition of non-identity—of acknowledging that a world beyond the self exists—but rather that non-identity, and so subjectivity, is fundamentally implicit within its practice. For Benjamin it was man's experience of history that possessed a practical transformative value. This was not simply through being purposeless, and as such, beyond domination, but because it was fundamentally a bridge to another world, to another reality. As a result, historical experience could change the entire worldview of the "historian." History embodied the human potential to construct knowledge because it was more than just an idiosyncratic experience that let otherness speak; it was something that provided a means to a new way of life and of relating to the object world—to a

¹⁸ "The subject erects that block when it claims supremacy over the object and thereby defrauds itself of it. As in truth nonidentical, the object distances itself farther from the subject the more the subject 'constitutes' the object" (Adorno 2005: 255).

new world, in other words. History for Benjamin was man's eternal and inescapable friend, a reminder of difference, which accompanied him for all time regardless of domination's attempt to cover over it with reifications attached to illusions of progress and the naturalness of the status quo. And perhaps Adorno too acknowledged this when he speculated in *Negative Dialectics* that "the turn in evolutionary history that gave the human species its open consciousness," which broke it out of immediacy and sense dependence, was potentially initiated by "an awareness of death," or, in other words, by the demonstration to man that the present can be different from the past and hence could hold its own potential, by the agent's first recognition of the existence of externality (Adorno 2003: 395). Adorno presumes here that agency is responsible for the creation of ontology in the original instance since its very unnaturalness would seem to require a creative power that can evidently only come from man. In Benjamin's conception of history, the past and present were equal partners in bringing forth the new; history provided a bridge that perhaps humans alone could cognitively cross between two worlds that compelled the mind to look beyond the present, to have a cognizance of otherness. History was messianic, because it was life transforming, it spoke to a different world and as such held the capacity to lend itself to the creation of a better world by reminding people that present reality always has the potential to become more than what it seems. Through history Benjamin believed that people could fulfill what he termed the "wish image" the distinctly human dream of reconciliation with the non-identical, of peace and authenticity, co-opted by consumer capitalism.

Like Benjamin, I maintain that history demands the participation of the subject because it actually refers to nothing in reality. As with art, we know that when we engage with history we are not dealing with the object as it is. We can never hold history in our hands, but are always seeing a representation of it through the mind's eye. Moreover, since it is never self-evident, it therefore must and cannot help but be engaged with subjectively.¹⁹ In this way, history, in its exemplariness, resembles art. However, art still refers to itself, i.e. the artwork, even if this self is implicitly false. But, history is inherently a concept without an object. And in this way and intertwined with history's ability to make people cognizant that reality exceeds their preconceptions, is that history is never completed because it does not refer to anything that can

¹⁹ As Lowenthal writes, "memory, history, and relics continually refurbish our awareness of the past. But how can we be sure that they reflect what has happened? The past is gone, its parity with things now seen, recalled, or read about can never be proved. No statement about the past can be confirmed by examining the supposed facts... Unlike geographically remote places we could visit if we made the effort, the past is beyond reach. Present facts known indirectly could in principle be verified; past facts by their very nature cannot" (Lowenthal 1985: 187).

be indicated directly in existing reality and for this reason demands participation on the part of the subject.²⁰ This is implicit in historical consciousness because unlike other abstractions no one can ever experience the past; it is by definition beyond lived reality. As Adorno said about art, even if history presents us with only an illusion of having transcended accumulated self-evident meaning through imbuing within us a feeling that we are encountering something not composed of it, it is an "illusion" that nonetheless provides an insight into something far more profound. Likewise, historical consciousness—the difference implicit in our remembrance or imagining of the past, our awareness that nothing in present reality can hope to recreate it as it was, and that our experience of it cannot simply be encompassed by the present—implicitly reminds us that time and experience are singular, exemplary, and irreducible to taken for granted meaning alone. Like art, its ability to exceed the present and to take us beyond what we thought mattered, also presents us with a sort of purposeless space. Moreover, just as with the selectivity of memory, history's otherness demands that we contribute to it through an active reconstruction. It consequently also has an emergent quality, like art, whereby the different pieces that have been put into it cannot be taken in isolation, since they are participating in something that does not correspond to a given reality but is implicitly unreal and thereby reaches beyond the present meaning.

History is also always purposeless or superfluous in a system organized around reification, one unaware of its own man-madeness and inability to grasp reality as it really is. However, it is this very superfluity that provides a possible escape from reification's self-imposed bounds. Adorno and Horkheimer once wrote that "all reification is forgetting" (Adorno; Horkheimer 1987: 191). A present that only acknowledges its own merit has no need for the past. Even when history tries to make the present the object of the past, it does so not only by ignoring what it cannot accommodate, as with all conceptual thinking, but by also

²⁰ For R. G. Collingwood also the "facts" of history—names, dates, and artefacts—were not themselves history but merely its raw material. "They are dry bones, which may some day become history, when someone is able to clothe them with the flesh and blood of a thought which is both his own and theirs" (Collingwood 1956: 305). History is thereby only history when we engage with it subjectively as actors, when we "re-enact" it through our imagination, because history depends on a contemporary historian reaching back into the past to bring the meaningful side of experience back to life. Collingwood argued, in a way similar to Dilthey and Weber, that this is what we do when we think historically, we undertake the re-enactment of the meaningful side of experience, thinking, as experienced by another. As he writes "the gulf of time must be bridged from both ends" (Collingwood 1956: 314). For Collingwood, history was no less objective a pursuit than the natural sciences because its subject matter, meaningful action, uniquely rendered it capable of being re-actualized in the present. This is because when we think about past thought, historically, he maintained that we literally relive the thoughts of others in our own subjectivity. And for this reason history was always something inevitably malleable, creatively adaptable to present need.

rendering itself superfluous, thereby again opening up a space for a potential agency. In a sense, history because of its form can never be rendered permanently purposeful to an existing system of domination tied to the present, as say art can become in the culture industry. It always has room for an agency, even, paradoxically, when it is an agency tied or submissive to a reified system of domination.

The Project

In what follows I want to use the creative space that history provides for the subject to show the point of origin for what I take to be modernity's attempt to eliminate otherness. I want to make clear, or bring into stark relief modernity's view of the subject and object, as well as its consequences. I will, in a sense, go beyond Adorno and the Frankfurt School, I will push their inquiry back very far indeed to a time and place that they themselves never sought to go, in order to make an innovative use of their search for a peace with otherness. My intention is to show the genesis of the Western expectation that otherness is something ephemeral, or illusory, something that could be definitively overcome or was even non-existent. By virtue of the interdependence of subject and object, and in turn of agency as a product of the non-identical, as Adorno demonstrated, I argue that it is by tracing this moment and its implications that one can also find the starting point for, and thus have a better understanding of, the alienation with which the Frankfurt School was so concerned. Rather than do this through an abstract discussion that runs the risk of becoming esoteric I want to pursue this line of inquiry through concrete example to avoid the pitfalls of an unintelligible jargon. Thus I will look at how a key group of thinkers in the "West" have themselves creatively re-imagined the subject, albeit in completely different ways, to construct systems that sought to come to terms with otherness. As we will see, otherness would take on varied and changing forms, which were far broader in their scope than the non-identity which Adorno identified. The meaning of otherness would at times primarily reflect either man's relationship to his own inner nature, to external nature, to other people, or to a divinity that governs reality. Otherness itself would change, in ways that Adorno never set out to address in parallel to changes in the conception of the subject on whom the very recognition and appreciation of non-identity depends. In what follows I will primarily focus on the subject, on the alienated subject rather than on otherness itself, on the subject as a way to get to

otherness. I am repeating in this, as we shall see, the *modus operandi* of the other figures that I examine but in a new and I hope liberatory form. Like them I want to find a path to a resolution or accommodation with otherness through man himself. As with Adorno's negative dialectics I will clear a path to otherness through showing the failure of man's conceptions, but in this case through showing the failures of man's conceptions of himself rather than the failures of his conceptions of the external world.

I propose to examine what I see as an approach to the subject which is akin to the illusory mastery of existence promised by the false prophets against which the Frankfurt School was especially opposed, but which is far older and perhaps even prefigures the characteristics of modernity that they so detested. The basis of the type of thought which critical theory rails against, in all its varied yet common forms, is first and foremost a mentality, an expectation about the world and the subject. This mentality, this worldview, this normative set of beliefs meant to govern man's relationship to reality, relies above all on an expectation about man and the world beyond him and on a set of assumptions that are intertwined with this. To find the basis of this mentality, this project will look at attempts to encompass the world "as it is," to erase or come to terms with otherness not through a scientific apparatus or system of abstraction, but through its actual literal mental conquest or absorption in a standard of human conduct believed to hold the key not just to remedying man himself, as one might expect, but even the failings of the external world itself. This constitutes a more fundamental solution to otherness, a more blatant attempt to do what modernity has tried to do but in thought itself, a psychological conquest of the object world through the self itself. Indeed, wouldn't such a mentality logically have to prefigure a practical attempt to put in into action, since the expectation that it was possible would need to come before its material expression. I will even contend that in this mental conquest and its characteristics can be detected all of the most problematic, alienating, and dehumanizing aspects of the "enlightenment" thinking identified by critical theory, but in a more pervasive form, indeed as the explicit objective of the systems of thought that I will review rather than as their unintentional by-product, namely: that the world must be used as a means to an end rather than as a means in itself, the emphasis on problem solving, on perfection as being the end goal and expectation of human endeavour, and above all an anthropomorphism that elevates man above the world. They were overt, at least at their genesis, because they were the

actual objective, intention, or thought out implication of the attempt to eradicate otherness through the orientation of man to a particular way of being.

The figures that I will review were all searching for an authentic subjectivity, even if they did so in ways that ultimately limited man's scope of action, and like them I want to see if I can find a way out of my own problematic, the apparent lack of agency that is allotted to man in the modern world and the struggle that we all experience with that which is beyond our understanding. It is my contention that Saint Augustine's theology, with his *City of God* especially as its culmination, presents a kind of threshold for this kind of thinking, a point at which the wave of humility before the object and doubts about man's place in the universe and his destiny, that perhaps prior to him had risen and fallen, finally broke and never rolled back. As we shall see every component of his thought was geared toward not simply transcending but definitively solving otherness. He was obsessed with the idea of man's destiny as being a problem-free existence. And I maintain that the unique features of both his search and solution to otherness, which allowed him to provide the assurance that his age cried out for, have reverberated into our own time. Security for him, definitive relief from uncertainty, presupposed totality. In his monomania the solution to otherness had by necessity to be complete, there was no room for anything other, no room for anything outside of his path to redemption. This is because for Augustine, as we shall see, a plausible expectation of surmounting otherness could only come if man himself, the subject, was its cause. Totality and man as the cause of otherness were interlinked, inextricable elements of his approach, because it was only in this way that the promise of a solution to everything could be found. This connection, so explicit in Augustine, would remain but become implicit in succeeding approaches to otherness which relied on the form of his solution, but completely departed from its content. He sought the "key," presumed to exist, to unlock the mystery of life in man himself, arguing that man could know reality literally "as it is" only through knowing himself, his nature, that solving man or the "human problem" was the means through which everything else could be known.

The crux of my argument is that the unique characteristics of Augustine's search for certainty created a sort of sure and stable foundation on which later ideologies which denied the subject, so as to solve otherness, could build and flourish. Augustine's intellectual impact on Western thought cannot be overstated. He was the deepest and most comprehensive exponent of the worldview that accompanied the rise of Christianity. He was so prolific in his writings, so

original in his thinking, that his ideas served as the foundation of a Christian doctrine that exercised unquestioned dominance over Western Europe for a thousand years if not more. His thought, perhaps puts into starkest relief not just the mentality of his age, and thereby what of it has laid the basis for our own, but served as a landmark in history, a kind of bottleneck through which the entire intellectual culture of the West was perceived long after it. In what follows I will examine the origins and characteristics of four transformative ideologies or worldviews in Western history; the theological, the idealistic, the social, and the transcendental of Saint-Augustine, Francesco Petrarch, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Arthur de Gobineau respectively. I will show how each stemmed from individual attempts to come to terms with the otherness that overshadows human existence by putting forth definitive answers to the question of what man is. This work will endeavour to demonstrate the connection, underlying continuity, between Augustine's ideas and succeeding solutions to otherness which, notwithstanding their immense difference, have sought to explain man and nature in comparable ways and with similar expectations and so, unbeknownst to themselves, have been caught in Augustine's web.

The choice of primary texts in this work is necessarily idiosyncratic, but nonetheless far from arbitrary. In every case priority has been given to writings that set forth the angst, or personal turmoil, of the figures indicated above, as reflecting the larger problems of the sociohistorical configuration in which they lived and the means that they used to solve to them, with special emphasis on their use of history. Consequently, I relied primarily on autobiographies and writings that helped to demonstrate the impetus and resolution of their respective attempts to provide man with a system that could remedy all of his problems. The enormity of Augustine's collected works, which exceed five million words (Fitzgerald and Cavadini 1999: XV), necessitated that I restrict myself to his three most essential texts: his autobiographical *Confessions*, his epistemological *De Trinitate* or *On the Trinity*, and, most especially, the culmination of his theology in *De Civitate Dei* or *The City of God*. I drew on Augustine's sermons and other writings only as a means of providing context for the *The City of God's* composition and for discussing its more complicated ideas. Similarly, the works of Petrarch on which this work concentrated were his autobiographical *Secretum*, or *Secret Book*, and his resolution to man's problems as depicted in the *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae*, *Remedies for Fortunes Fair and Foul*. I included Petrarch's poetry, letters, and historical writings only where they served to better explain his own attempt to construct a system to relieve

man of his anxiety. The complexity of Rousseau's philosophy demanded a slightly more comprehensive approach. To demonstrate the personal factors that led to the construction of his theory of man I relied on his own version of the *Confessions*. I then moved on to examine all of his major works with the aim of showing that they functioned together as a piece to set the stage for Rousseau's image of man perfected in *Emile*. For Gobineau I relied principally on his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races*, examining his letters and plays only where they could clarify the motive and characteristics of the racial system for which he argues.

As a word to the wise, I must caution the reader that this work is long. Its argument is as disparate as the figures it examines. While it might appear at first sight to be relentlessly Eurocentric it is anything but, as will become evident from the central role that I give to the North African Augustine in the formation of a mindset traditionally considered exclusively "European." Likewise, my use of the word "man" as opposed to "human," as has doubtless already not gone unnoticed, while regretful was done purely for the sake of expediency, so as to make my own terminology consistent with the writings of the figures that I reviewed. I would have liked to include much more in my discussion of course, a more nuanced engagement with the secondary sources, an examination of the relationship to otherness that I see as prevalent in Ancient Greece and Rome. yet the length of this work obliges me to stay within the bounds, or constraints, of such an investigation. I appeal to your patience and indulgence because this story deserves to be heard and cannot be told in any other way. I believe that the position that it will put forward is a novel one that has largely gone ignored in the past because it relies on a unique understanding of ancient history, philosophy, and critical theory.

CHAPTER TWO: Augustine

In a way that could be said of few others, Saint Augustine's life stood astride of two worlds, one looking toward the Classical past and another toward a Christian future. Augustine's intellectual journey took him through all the different ways by which Late Antique culture had tried to establish a relationship or stable bridge to otherness and so find certainty in an uncertain world. Augustine's whole existence embodied—perhaps more than anyone else of his time—this struggle for something more than man and as a result he would take thought in a new direction, with bolder and surer steps than had any of his contemporaries. Augustine was born on November 13, 354 in what is today Tunisia. His birthplace of Thagaste, a little inland town at the foot of the mountains, no doubt resembled thousands of *municipia* stretching across Roman North Africa and indeed the entire Roman world. These were administrative and trading centers populated by a few thousand inhabitants. Within even the smallest of them could usually be found baths, schools, temples, theatres, arenas, and all the other accoutrements that went along with the self-conscious urbanism of Greco-Roman civilization. By the middle of the fourth century this more traditional Roman way of life was in full transformation and many signs hinted at its final unravelling. North Africa, the breadbasket of the Empire, with its incredible irrigation schemes that turned what are today deserts into fertile plains, and with its natural defences—the sea on one side and the mountains and great desert to the south on the others—was an oasis of stability and prosperity in a world of upheaval. While the social structure in the rest of the Empire had become increasingly authoritarian, with the state stepping in to take on the role of an urban elite increasingly withdrawn and reticent to fulfill their traditional roles, the old order maintained itself in North Africa as it had managed to nowhere else. It was in this comfortable and somewhat anachronistic world that Augustine was raised by his Berber Christian mother, Monica, and likely Latin pagan father, Patricius. And perhaps it was Augustine's life in Africa whose beginning and end would differ so drastically, that gave him the foresight and hindsight to juxtapose the old and the new more clearly and profoundly than most men of his age, to see that which the past had unsuccessfully sought and what the future promised to deliver.

The Making of a Saint

Augustine's father was a town notable, a class of men, as Paul Veyne puts it, who were "besotted by vanity" (Veyne 1987: 232). As a *decurion*, a sort of tax official *cum* city councillor, Patricius, in the context of the *polis*, would have been a figure who commanded the respect of those around him.²¹ In the Roman world, it was primarily the local notables that were expected to pay for the amenities of the *polis*, not owing simply to a charitable spirit of philanthropy but through conspicuous displays of consumption aimed at gaining status in a system that was the very bedrock of ancient city-life called *euergetism*, literally "good work" in Greek. This is why Augustine describes Patricius as a man who perennially lived beyond his means owing to his desire to impress his neighbours.²² Perhaps not surprisingly, in light of his later theology, Augustine expresses a dislike for his own father which would mirror his later criticism of the materialism of Classical culture generally. Patricius must have seemed to Augustine—writing in retrospect, preoccupied by questions of man's nature and destiny—to have been a small and petty man of very limited horizons, driven by vanity and fixated on pursuing the worldly over the spiritual, a man self-absorbed in his own humanity at the cost of the real and true.²³

In his youth, Augustine enjoyed an education that was fairly typical of a child from the upper middle class. He had a tutor to teach him the basics of Latin literature, and at the age of twelve began attending a grammar school in the nearby town of Madaura. There he followed, like all other educated Romans, a curriculum based almost entirely on rhetoric, the foundation, indeed practically the entirety, of what education consisted in the ancient world.²⁴ The objective of Roman education was always to instil in the student an ability to demonstrate a familiarity

²¹ Decurions were entitled to sit in special seats in the theatre, enjoyed legal privileges such as an exemption from capital punishment and, owing to their connections and control over government contracts, occupied a central place in the economic basis of Roman society, the reciprocal network of obligations between low and high that was the patron-client relationship.

²² He derived his income from vineyards.

²³ The most striking example of this is his description of his father's overjoyed reaction at the public baths to what Augustine would one day take to be the most visible reminder of man's misery, an inopportune erection. As Augustine would later write in the *Confessions*, addressing God, his father's delight at this "was that of the intoxication which makes the world oblivious of you, its Creator, and to love your creation instead of you. He was drunk with the invisible wine of his perverse will directed downwards to inferior things" (Augustine 1992: 27; *Confessions* II, 7).

²⁴ This involved not just instilling the ability to speak well and persuasively in the students, but also a heavy emphasis on rote memorization to aid in the making of literary and historical allusions that were of central importance to ancient oratory. Augustine would one day come to condemn these pursuits with scorn because they appealed to the vanity of men through elevating human deeds over that of God's.

with culture and thus of one's superiority through learning, and through this greater humanity and the legitimacy to rule, to persuade and lead not by the exertion of force or monetary power but by speech in the incredibly gregarious climate that was the ancient polis. The only concern of his teachers, Augustine would one day complain, was not that he should learn how to live rightly but "that I should learn to speak as effectively as possible and carry conviction by my oratory" (Augustine 1992: 26; *Confessions* II, 5).

Augustine's critical comments above speak to his palpable dissatisfaction with the prevailing culture as he found it growing up in North Africa. The humanistic orientation that prevailed in ancient Greece and Rome on account of the social and political realities of those civilizations is generally well known. This work is not about Classical culture *per se*, it is about Augustine's theology and its influence on the Western mindset, nevertheless in order to understand his ideas I must make a few comments on the approach of the ancients to otherness as I understand it. The Greco-Roman world as Augustine knew it in Thagaste, and that perhaps in his mind his own father embodied, pointed the individual to the worldly in a marked fashion.²⁵ Rhetoric was the pre-eminent example for Augustine of how the mentality of his own time had gone wrong, how it had become separated from the divine.²⁶ The amorality, the relativism of rhetoric's approach to truth, its appeal to human custom and understanding over any higher considerations were all together, he writes, the "conventions of the world where I, as a wretched boy, lay on the threshold. This was the arena in which I was to wrestle. I was more afraid of committing a barbarism than if I did commit one, on my guard against feeling envy towards those who did not. These were the qualities for which I was praised by people whose approval was at that time my criterion of a good life" (Augustine 1992: 21; *Confessions* I, 29). All together, then, as would be exposed in Augustine's own life and struggles, the overriding commitment and acknowledgment of the ancients that they lived in a world made by men, that their existence as human beings was commensurate with their culture and experience, the relish that Roman society seemed to take in this and the basis that it provided for so much of Greco-

²⁵ In the *Confessions*, for instance, Augustine writes, addressing God, that his father "did not care what character before you I was developing, or how chaste I was so long as I possessed a cultured tongue – though my culture really meant a desert uncultivated by you" (Augustine 1992: 26; *Confessions* II, 5).

²⁶ As he would write, the degradation incurred through rhetorical training "has gone to such lengths" that if someone "pronounces the word 'human' contrary to the school teaching, without pronouncing the initial aspirate, he is socially censured more than if... he were to hate a human being, his fellow-man... He is extremely vigilant in precautions against some error in language, but is indifferent to the possibility that the emotional force of his mind may bring about a man's execution" (Augustine 1992: 21; *Confessions* I, 29).

Roman civilization, seemed to encourage a search in Late Antiquity for something else, something more than man (Dihle 1982: 10).

Augustine's first exposure to something more profound than the Classical milieu in which he was raised came with his introduction to philosophy at the age of 19 through a now lost dialogue of Cicero entitled *Hortensius*. The work deeply moved him with its emphasis on living a life in the pursuit of a firm and lasting truth and of eternal virtues thought to correspond to a higher and more permanent existence.²⁷ Augustine's early encounter with this work likely gave rise within him to a deep seated fear of error and so to a desire for certainty that would remain throughout his life (BeDuhn 2009: 29). The book was his first exposure to the realm of perfection presumed by many in ancient philosophy to lie beyond, and to be responsible for, the material world. And attaining to this perfection would become the preeminent preoccupation of Augustine's life. It led him to question, for the first time, the merits of a cultural environment that he had perhaps previously taken for granted, the pursuit of worldly goods and fame in favour of a fixation on how to go about living in a way conducive to the immortal. At this point in his life, though, beyond this single work by Cicero, Augustine had very little, if any, knowledge of philosophy owing not just to his education's exclusive focus on rhetorical training, but more importantly to his lack of knowledge of Greek, the language of philosophy in the ancient world.

Augustine read the *Hortensius* after entering the University of Carthage at the age of 17.²⁸ Carthage would be the culmination of Augustine's schooling. Attending the university was a privilege reserved not just for the wealthy but also for the most gifted. From an early age Augustine's great potential was lost on no one; he had distinguished himself among his peers by his phenomenal memory and quick mind, the two key attributes in the educational context of the time. The purpose of his schooling at Carthage was not simply to acquire a knowledge of how to use rhetoric, but also to prepare him to be a teacher and professional rhetorician. In this way it

²⁷ "I was impressed not by the book's refining effect on my style and literary expression but by the content. My God, how I burned, how I burned with longing to leave earthly things and fly back to you... 'Love of wisdom' is the meaning of the Greek word philosophia. This book kindled my love for it" (Augustine 1992: 39; *Confessions* III, 7-8).

²⁸ As he briefly notes in the *Confessions*, his father had died a year earlier, when Augustine was 16. For all his apparent animosity to his father and what he stood for, Augustine admits in the *Confessions* that Patricius spent more money than he ought to have on his education, aided by a wealthy man of Thagastae named Romanianus, for whom he would one day write his *De Vera Religione*. But, Augustine conceives this as being motivated more by a desire to raise the family's status than by love. No doubt he would later come to see his father's own selfish actions as being used by God to bring about positive change.

was perhaps equivalent to a modern day doctoral degree.²⁹ And it was in Carthage also that Augustine would take the first step on the journey that would eventually lead him to Christianity, toward actually finding a path to what he took to be the transcendent by joining a religious movement that promised to have all the answers to his questions. Above all his preoccupations was the question of evil, or in other words why men, who are ostensibly in full command of their faculties seemingly actively choose to do what they know to be wrong or immoral, why they fail to abide by the perfection that seems within their grasp through error and temptation, and from this why the world seems so consistently to stray from their expectations despite the apparent Godlike nature of human intelligence.

Manichaeism

It was this desire to explain evil, then, that would be the primary driver of Augustine's first "conversion," not to Christianity but to a religious movement called Manichaeism, to which he would adhere for the next nine years (Augustine 1992: 77; *Confessions* V, 10).³⁰ Manichaeism was essentially the ancient equivalent of a modern day new age religion (O'Donnell 2006: 48). Augustine's conversion to a religion of this nature might seem odd in retrospect but it is important to remember that Manichaeism at this time, for all its bizarre claims, was at the cutting edge of philosophical speculation about the world. This is because it offered in rational terms a theory capable of explaining and thereby accounting for all of reality and it consequently attracted many budding intellectuals such as Augustine. Augustine here was aware of the pitfalls of a mysticism which would merely trap the individual in submission to the creations of one's own mind. Above all perhaps he was aware of the disdain which Greco-Roman culture, and his elite peers especially, tended to attach to faith, raw belief, over reason. He wanted to find truth in the sense of that which could be objective and so have a reality beyond the confines of individual experience. Manichaeism asked why evil exists, it did not accept it as something inherent in reality or merely relative to the good, and in this sense it was

²⁹ The freedom of being far away from his parents for the first time, along with the libertine atmosphere of the place, also caused Augustine to give into the sexual desires that had been incubating within him. In Carthage he took a concubine, he never reveals her name, and not long after a son was born from this union, who was called Adeodatus or a "gift from God."

³⁰ As Augustine would later write of the Manichee fixation on evil, "it was as if some sharp intelligence were persuading me to consent to the stupid deceivers when they asked me: 'Where does evil come from?'" (Augustine 1992: 43; *Confessions* III, 12).

rational. As Brown puts it Augustine was a man who "wanted complete certainty on ultimate questions. He might have 'heard' that a man was solely responsible for his evil actions: but, as a Manichee, he had been encouraged to ask why such evil actions should happen at all – a very different and more fundamental question" (Brown 1967: 79).

What briefly then were the characteristics of the Manichaeism that so held Augustine's interest? Manichaeism was more or less a Gnostic cult founded in the third century on the revelations of the Persian mystic Mani. Mani regarded himself as the last of a line of prophets that included Zoroaster and Jesus Christ.³¹ He claimed that God had revealed the secrets of the structure of the universe to him in a series of visions, along with the reason for the existence of good and evil, and the ultimate destiny of the earth. Manichaeism was a dualist philosophy in that it cast the material world, believed to be a place of evil and darkness, against the world of the divine, an entirely spiritual realm full of light, to which the soul and other aspects of reality belonged. Mani claimed that at the beginning of the world the realms of light and darkness were separate and that each was ruled by different gods until the God of darkness, or matter, grew jealous of the light and attacked it. The God of light sent man to the realm of matter to do battle against it, but upon losing to darkness man found himself trapped in the material world. The forces of evil imprisoned the soul of man in his material body so that, as Augustine describes, "the light might be held by them lest it should escape" (Augustine 2007: 363). Man's soul along with the light that the darkness had taken captive in the initial battle then went on to form the world as we now know it, effectively imprisoning portions of the God of light in the material world.³² Basically the world of darkness was doomed to inevitable defeat in the Manichean cosmology because the forces of light within man would gradually be unleashed through the spiritual direction of the prophets guided by the God of light. At the final battle between the two the original duality in the universe between good and evil would be restored and man would be purified. Man would again become a wholly spiritual being but now a sort of knowing subject, possessing knowledge of the danger presented by the material world of darkness.

Manichaeism, consequently, offered a clear explanation for the existence of evil or imperfection in man's experience of the world and a path to its eventual overcoming. Evil was a natural part of the world, it was constituted from eternally living raw material. The task of the

³¹ Manichean theology did not subscribe to the virgin birth, Christian Scripture, or the Crucifixion.

³² The Manichees "speak of that part of the nature of God as everywhere mixed up in heaven, in earth, in all bodies dry and moist, in all sorts of flesh, in all seeds of trees, herbs, men, and animals" (Augustine 2007: 362).

Manicheans while embodied was to try and purify themselves so as to be fit to return to the world of light from which man, as was evident from his spirituality and desire for the transcendent, clearly arose.³³ Man's purification in order to return to his authentic nature in God took the form of acquiring, through studying Mani's revelations, an understanding of how the soul corresponded to the world of light.³⁴ In this way Manichean disdain for the material world suited the mood of the time the feeling in many minds, as Dodds writes, "that the physical world... is under the sway of evil powers, and that what the soul needs is not unity with it but escape from it" (Dodds 1956: 248).

The followers of Mani were divided into two groups: the "auditors" or hearers and the "elect." The elect observed the directives of Mani's revelations; they devoted their entire lives to the study of the cult's teaching. The duty of the hearers, whose number included Augustine, was to materially provide for the elect through earning an income in the secular world and to wait upon them while they dined. In this way it was believed that the hearers would earn spiritual favour with the God of light and with the elect so as to assist them in their own salvation. The Manichees argued that the evidence of Mani's revelations was all around them. And in this way, and as would be important for Augustine later on, they incorporated not just a portion of creation into God or the good but depicted the entirety of the externality beyond him as inevitably connected to man's own spiritual liberation and, judging by his later theology, this was no doubt among the primary draws of the cult for Augustine.³⁵ In Manichaeism the world was drawn into the self, seen as contiguous with it, the macrocosm into the microcosm, in a way that very much suited contemporary desires and expectations. Likewise, and for this same reason, proof of the transcendent soul or authentic self that was so desperately sought in Late Antiquity could, for the

³³ The Manichees asserted that "the soul is by nature that which God is" (Augustine 2010: 135; *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees* 2.26.38).

³⁴ It also came in the form of observing a set of practices guaranteed to deliver enlightenment such as abstaining from meat, since flesh was taken to embody the material *par excellence*, eating only foods which were thought to contain remnants of the light, thereby releasing them, and in renouncing sexual activity, whose surrender to passion and instinct was thought to be bodily darkness incarnate.

³⁵ The Manicheans argued, for instance, that the waxing and waning of the moon was not the product of the movement of the celestial bodies but of liberated spiritual fragments of light flowing up from the Earth. The Sun also was a visible embodiment of the world of light for the Manichees "and so they worship this sun which we see... they say that this sun is a particle of light in which God dwells" (Augustine 2010: 53; *Two Books on Genesis, Against the Manichees* 1.3.6). As Brown writes, "to a pagan... the Sun was, plainly, a 'visible god'... A Manichee would have seen in the Sun nothing less than the visible brilliance of a part of himself, a fragment of his own good substance in the last stage of its distillation, ready to merge again into the 'Kingdom of Light.' He would have experienced the thrill of being involved in an ineluctable process... No religious system, indeed, had ever treated the visible world so drastically, and with such literalism, as an externalization of an inner, spiritual conflict" (Brown 1967: 45-46).

Manichees, undeniably be located in a very visceral way throughout existence itself. Supporting the elect was essentially construed by the Manichees as akin to purchasing an indulgence to remit one's sins in the High Middle Ages, with the important caveat that it would also help the hearer to win a holiness capable of bringing one to heaven. This is how Augustine retrospectively came to see his participation in the cult, as an attempt to deal with his growing disgust with what he increasingly perceived to be the worthless and false trappings of secular Classical culture. A "filth" as he terms it from which "we thought to purge ourselves... by supplying food to those whose title was the Elect and Holy, so that in the workshop of their stomach they could manufacture for us angels and gods to bring us liberation" (Augustine 1992: 52; *Confessions* IV, 1).³⁶

Augustine would remain in Carthage until 383. His life there was stable but his ambitions ultimately outgrew the city. He had been encouraged for several years by his friend Alypius and by some former students, all now living in Italy, to come and teach in Rome. They had told him that students in that city were more devoted to their studies and that the pay was better than in Carthage. The promise of a career in Rome, as I will discuss shortly, at the epicentre of the known world, must also have suited Augustine's image of himself as a man destined for great things and so appealed to his vanity. Augustine was promised financial assistance for the move by the Manicheans in Italy and his relocation there also became intertwined in his own mind with his dissatisfaction with the cult as it existed in Africa. A great motivation for moving to Rome was that he had expected to find the Italian Manicheans endowed with a special wisdom more sophisticated than that of their rustic counterparts. He knew that in Italy there were more fundamentalist Manichean sects that claimed to possess special revelations and knowledge of Mani's teachings (Augustine 1992: 84-85; *Confessions* V, 19). Augustine expected that they would provide a link to the answers that he sought through "a

³⁶ An important step in his loss of faith in Manichaeism would occur in Carthage owing to his sustained encounter, over several months, with one of its key thinkers, a preeminent member of the "elect" who supposedly embodied the divine, Faustus of Mileve, but whose lack of erudition and inability to reconcile the logical and dependable movement of the celestial bodies with Manichean theology left Augustine deeply dissatisfied. This undercut Manichaeism's pretensions to rationality, its problem solving ability. "I did not notice any rational account of solstices and equinoxes or eclipses of luminaries nor anything resembling what I had learnt in the books of secular wisdom. Yet I was ordered to believe Mani. But he was not in agreement with the rational explanations which I had verified by calculation and had observed with my own eyes" (Augustine 1992: 75; *Confessions* V, 6). Augustine's access to Faustus no doubt stemmed from his usefulness to the cult as a supporter, being a young man with a promising future, but it had the opposite of the desired effect. After this encounter, he came to the conclusion that Faustus, and thus Manichaeism as he knew it in North Africa, was not in possession of anything resembling the absolute truth that he sought so dearly.

body of knowledge absolutely certain in its every detail, and for that reason capable of being invested with every confidence" (BeDuhn 2009: 127). But when he arrived in Rome, Augustine was shocked by what he found. He grew increasingly frustrated by allegations of sexual misconduct among the elect and by his own inability to feel a sense of spiritual progress through abiding by the cult's dictates. Both issues pointed to the same problem in Augustine's mind; Manichaeism's overconfidence in man's ability to become good simply through adherence to a program that promised spiritual enlightenment.

Augustine would ultimately come to see the Manichean explanation for evil as unsatisfactory because its rationalism was premised on the idea that once the truth of its teachings were revealed men could not help but adhere to them on the pain of the denial of their own authentic selfhood.³⁷ Augustine felt stagnant in the religion on account of its removal of any sense of personal responsibility from man's purview.³⁸ The Manicheans claimed that they were setting free the good or the light that was imprisoned in the material world, but this came at the price of simply denying the validity of whatever they saw as opposed to their image of perfection rather than by really coming to terms with, or rather overcoming, evil. All of this left Augustine unable to account for his own continued inability to adhere to the moral life that he so ardently desired (BeDuhn 2009: 156). Importantly, Augustine also came to feel that the dualism of Manichean theology rendered the Good God imperfect and so not sufficiently transcendent or omniscient because of its vulnerability to evil. Such a God could not provide a safe harbour in a world of uncertainty.^{39 40}

The God which Augustine sought could, he would come to believe, have no part to play in anything that was less than perfect and so evil had to be located in a realm that was not caused or related in any way to a divinity which paradoxically had also to be capable of ruling and determining all of reality. As we have seen this was the great conundrum of his age, reconciling

³⁷ As Brown writes "the complexities of doubt, of ignorance, deep-rooted tension within the citadel of the will itself, are deliberately ignored in Manichaeism" (Brown 1967: 49).

³⁸ As Augustine writes "it flattered my pride to be free of blame and, when I had done something wrong, not to make myself confess to you that you might heal my soul; for it was sinning against you" (Augustine 1992: 84; *Confessions* V, 18).

³⁹ "According to their sacrilegious vaporings, God liberated Himself in a certain part from a great evil, but again condemned Himself in another part, which He could not liberate" (Augustine 2007: 42).

⁴⁰ The Manichees, Augustine came to believe, had as a way out of their inability to come to terms with their own evil, saw fit to taint God, by claiming that "(God's) substance suffers evil (rather) than that their own substance actively does evil" (Augustine 1992: 113; *Confessions* VII, 4). The passiveness of the Manichee Good God, his essentially unchanging and abiding goodness in the face of the Evil God, his toleration of evil forces, and what this suggested about his lack of omnipotence also became a great concern to Augustine.

perfection with imperfection, man with existence. The answers to all of this, most of his contemporaries agreed, seemed to depend on some kind of transcendent divinity occupying, in BeDuhn's words, "a scale of power and relative permanence and invulnerability" far beyond man. In this sense Augustine's search for such a God reflected the deeply rooted "'common sense' valuations in his culture" (BeDuhn 2009: 159). And indeed Augustine writes in the *Confessions* that he never doubted the existence of such a God, one who was less anthropomorphic and whose omnipotence was more universal, but that at this point in his life he was frequently driven to despair because of his inability to reach Him (Augustine 1992: 120; *Confessions* VII, 11).

Neo-Platonism

Augustine would remain in Rome for less than a year. He was greatly disappointed by the intellectual climate of the city and by the dishonesty of his students who frequently disappeared near the end of their course of lessons without paying him for their studies. Finding himself considerably worse off than he had been in Carthage he contemplated returning to Africa. But he was saved from this eventuality by his Manichean connections and the patronage of the famous pagan apologist Symmachus, when, to his great fortune, he managed to obtain the position of rhetorician to the imperial court of Valentinian II, at this point ruling from Milan. And when he reached the city, despite the assistance rendered by the Manicheans in bringing him to Milan, he soon completely cut himself off from the sect.⁴¹ In Milan Augustine attended the sermons of Ambrose that city's famed and powerful bishop, at first evidently only to admire the man's rhetorical ability, but soon on account of a genuine interest in his teaching.⁴² Ambrose's Nicene Catholicism presented Augustine with a Christian faith radically different from that which he had known in North Africa. Ambrose was at the cutting edge in the Church

⁴¹ He lapsed into a sort of scepticism at this point mingled, through his desire to identify God with omnipotence, with a sort of pantheism that simply saw the divine as everywhere, "I thought that you permeate not only the body of heaven and air and sea but even earth, and that in everything, both the greatest and the smallest things, this physical frame is open to receive your presence" (Augustine 1992: 112; *Confessions* VII, 2).

⁴² Augustine's initial exposure to Christianity, as encouraged by his mother, had come in his youth, but he was turned off of the religion by the quite rustic belief system that predominated in North Africa and by the New Testament's lack of sophistication, the very literal translation, from the equally unsophisticated original Greek, which alone was available to Latin speakers before Jerome's famous translation in the 390s (Augustine 1992: 40; *Confessions* III, 9).

both intellectually and in terms of its ceremonial (Augustine 1992: 88; *Confessions* V, 23). Following on theological developments in Alexandria, Ambrose offered his parishioners a more sophisticated allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament and was also one of the first clergymen in the West to use liturgical music in his services as a means of enhancing the spiritual experience, as was typical only in the Eastern churches at this time (BeDuhn 2009: 165). It was probably during Ambrose's sermons that Augustine was first exposed to the Neo-Platonic ideas that would definitively transform his way of thinking.

Augustine eagerly sought out the writings of the Neo-Platonists, especially the *Enneads* of its founder Plotinus (Augustine 1992: 121; *Confessions* VII, 13). Neo-Platonism's influence would cause Augustine to come to see his former Manichean beliefs as too materialistic, as not sufficiently cognisant of the transcendent realm in which God and His perfection would necessarily reside, and equally of just how utterly incomprehensible the attributes, workings, and rationality of His omnipotence would have to be to human beings (Rist 1996: 9; BeDuhn 2009: 160).^{43 44} He came to realize that a truly omniscient God could not exist in time or space capriciously, through simply reacting to events, as did the Hebrew God of the Old Testament, because otherwise he could be acted upon and so lose his claim to total suzerainty, nor could God resemble a man physically in anyway for the same reason.⁴⁵ In rejecting the materiality of God, in Augustine's mind then, the Platonists made a major advance by lifting man's quest for divinity above the world itself because they had "recognized that no material object can be God" (Augustine 2003: 307).

Plotinus was an Egyptian philosopher who lived in the second century. He was the sort of Albert Einstein of late pagan philosophy. He built on Plato's theory of the forms and on the work of other philosophers such as Numenius.⁴⁶ In coming to Neo-Platonism Augustine faced the problem of trying to understand how God could both be within his sinful soul and in an

⁴³ "When I wanted to think of my God, I knew of no way of doing so except as a physical mass. Nor did I think anything existed which is not material. That was the principal and almost sole cause of my inevitable error" (Augustine 1992: 85; *Confessions* V, 19).

⁴⁴ "I was unaware of the existence of another reality, that which truly is... I had not realized God is a spirit, not a figure whose limbs have length and breadth and who has a mass" (Augustine 1992: 43; *Confessions* III, 12).

⁴⁵ "I a mere man, and a man with profound defects, was trying to think of you the supreme, sole and true God... Although you were not in the shape of the human body, I nevertheless felt forced to imagine something physical occupying space diffused either in the world or even through infinite space outside the world" (Augustine 1992: 111-112; *Confessions* VII, 1-2).

⁴⁶ Plotinus, who of course wrote in Greek, was only extensively translated into Latin in the fourth century by the intellectual and late convert to Christianity Marius Victorinus.

imperfect world, yet necessarily separate from them at the same time.^{47 48} The Manichean solution to this, as we have seen, was to naturalize evil and wholly separate it from the good, Plotinus, on the other hand, took the position that evil was merely a privation of the good. Through the influence of Plotinus Augustine would come to see the world, in contrast also to the contemporary ideas that predominated in the Church of his day, as "a thoroughly good place created by a thoroughly good god, that evil is only a question of names for things that are less good than other things" (O'Donnell 2009: 301). Evil, or error, came to be associated in Augustine's mind with a failure to know the good, i.e. God, caused by a turning away from him rather than an inexorable part of the world.⁴⁹ Building on Plato's theory of forms, Plotinus had envisioned material reality as an emanation of a more perfect realm. At the pinnacle of the universe was the One the essence from which the universal forms diffused. The One for the pagan philosophers was not just fundamentally above human understanding but, moreover, was in itself actually nothing. Its nothingness was its essential creative attribute which was what enabled it to emanate all the forms or ideas on which the universals that make up human knowledge were based.⁵⁰

Below the One was the "Nous" or the "divine intellect," the creative demiurge, the active force that reflected the power of the One and "thought" the forms which acted as the sort of blueprints for the material world. The world of sensation below the ideal forms was a degraded and chaotic world but, in contrast to the Manichee position on evil, it was not in itself bad, so long as it endeavoured to maintain its fealty to the forms. As each stage of reality declined to

⁴⁷ "Although I affirmed and firmly held divine immunity from pollution and change and complete immutability of our God... yet I had no clear and explicit grasp of the cause of evil" (Augustine 1992: 113; *Confessions* VII, 4).

⁴⁸ "Although I affirmed and firmly held divine immunity from pollution and change and complete immutability of our God... yet I had no clear and explicit grasp of the cause of evil" (Augustine 1992: 113; *Confessions* VII, 4).

⁴⁹ As Brown writes "Plotinus was able to help Augustine out of this dilemma... by casting both the spiritual and material as necessary components in the integrated continuum of an eternal universe... (And) it did nothing less than shift the centre of gravity of Augustine's spiritual life. He was no longer identified with his God: this God was utterly transcendent – His separateness had to be accepted. And, in realizing this, Augustine had to accept, that he, also, was separate and different from God" (Brown 1967: 90-91).

⁵⁰ This is because, for the ancients, in order for universals, the intelligible world of being, to possess the purity and consistency on which their function seemed to rely, that is to say the representative of types that are consistent and self-identical, they obviously could not have been created by something other than themselves. In the first place this is because if an idea, a universal, was capable of creating another idea, the pagan philosophers reasoned, it would imply that this idea possessed a knowledge of itself, that is to say of its difference from something else, and would through this self-understanding so engage in the multiplicity of life which was precisely what universals were above. In the second place, if an idea were capable of creating another idea it would imply that it already had it within itself as an immanent possibility and as such "if the superior already had that which it causes, it could not cause it, it would be it" (Gilson 1952: 23).

something below it— from the One, to the intelligibility of the Nous, to the material—each higher stage provided the source of the lower's consciousness, the form of its being.⁵¹ The world is conceived of here in naturalistic terms as a sort of eternal organism, in perfect equilibrium with itself. It is not headed to any end goal but to its self-perpetuation; it does not exist for a purpose; it simply is. The Neo-Platonists believed that the soul of man, since its rationality mirrored the structure of reality, could uniquely of the animals, essentially discard itself and return to the One through a program of intensive study and meditation. He could do this because man's intellect provided him with a means of tracing his way back to the "One." The Neo-Platonic "Sage," as was also true of the Stoic Sage, was one who could elevate himself to a sense of intimacy with and thereby touch the higher power and unity evidently behind all existence.⁵² In reaching this unity man could gain the permanency which so eluded him on earth yet paradoxically, as had been known since the time of Plato, seemed to somehow provide in universal concepts the basis for human thought.

The Sage could become "aware of his being within the All, as a miniscule point of brief duration, but capable of dilating into the immense field of infinite space and of seizing the whole of reality in a single intuition" (Hadot 2004: 205). This was achieved, among other ways, through man's unique capacity to realize the limitations inherent within his own concepts, the problem of universals, and, by drawing the correct implications from this realisation, through the making of a concerted effort to untangle the illusions that constituted reality (Gilson 1952: 22). The Sage could return to that which was at the origin of all being by adjusting himself to its ultimate unity through training and self-discipline. And in so doing, he could escape the constant becoming of existence, its perilous chaos, through abandoning his earthly reason and cares. He could attempt to forget himself but only after years of the tireless pursuit of

⁵¹ As Brown poetically writes of the Neo-Platonic image of the world "what we see around us is a disintegrated communication of this concentration of the whole. It is as if an artist, faced with the execution of a single theme, should lose his 'nerve': he becomes ever more diffuse, more literal; the first intensity goes. The vision has become scattered; but it is that same vision that he is striving to communicate" (Brown 1967: 97). Every higher stage is merely the lower perfected, each lower stage consists of a "continuous tension" within every part, as Brown writes, "to 'return' to the source of its consciousness. This tension for completion is what linked the One directly to each manifestation of Its intensity" (Brown 1967: 89).

⁵² The Sage would strive to see what was beyond the impermanent particulars, the pale reflections of true existence that in themselves could not account for the mystery of how life can be perceived through concepts, which in themselves seem to have no existence. The Sage could bring himself to the level of the One that which was at the origin of all archetypes and souls, like the idea of massless elementary particles in physics this was a sort of formlessness without division or definition which, as we just saw, could thereby be taken to have made up the original basis of all reality.

transcendence, but even then, he might be expected to reach the level of the One only once or twice.⁵³ But the work involved to attain this would be well worth it because it was only at these moments that the Sage would attain to a state of true reality. In the process the Sage would lose himself and essentially become nothing or everything by "laying aside the burden of existential anguish" (Hadot 2004: 233).

Augustine found in the One the omniscience that was lacking in Manichaeism that he deeply desired.⁵⁴ As indicated, he came to realize that his view of the divinity had prior to this time been too material, that God was so much higher than human beings so as to remain wholly unintelligible to them. Yet he also found disappointment in Neo-Platonism. He questioned how human happiness could be found in something that was so impermanent and ephemeral as a momentary communication with the "One," since true happiness, as he would later maintain, could only come in that which one knew was not liable to be taken away, something in other words that was also eternal, i.e. forever (Augustine 2003: 590).⁵⁵ But Neo-Platonism, rooted as it was in Classical philosophy, did not claim to offer a definitive solution to otherness, but only the temporary transcendence of man's material condition.

Thus although he considered them to be "deservedly the best known of all philosophers," Augustine grew frustrated with Neo-Platonism because it did not offer the deliverance, or the promise of it, that he sought; its God was too remote and completely lacking in compassion for man and detached from his individual trials and tribulations as a man. In the same way, Augustine, judging from the enormous emphasis that he places on the self in the *Confessions*, also no doubt found that the discarding of the personality that was necessary to achieve the One was incommensurate with, and essentially rendered meaningless, his own introspective turmoil. As he writes, "true reasoning convinced me that I should wholly subtract all remnants of every kind of form if I wished to conceive the absolutely formless. I could not achieve this"

⁵³ Achieving communion with the One would not allow the Sage to see all reality as it was and so to gain perfect knowledge of it, instead the Sage was brought to a higher state of consciousness and could only partake in it by abandoning everything and in the process obliterating his earthly consciousness. For this reason when he attained the Nirvana of the One the Sage effectively thereafter became a living god by saying "'Yes' to the entire universe" (Hadot 2004: 221-222).

⁵⁴ As Augustine writes addressing his God, "after reading the books of the Platonists and learning from them to seek for immaterial truth... I was sure that you truly are, and are always the same; that you never become other or different in any part or by any movement of position, whereas all things derive from you" (Augustine 1992: 129-130; *Confessions* VII, 26).

⁵⁵ As Nash writes "knowledge of absolute truth," in the sense of something that was permanent, seemed to him "a necessary condition for happiness" (Nash 2003: 3).

(Augustine 1992: 248; *Confessions* XII, 6). Augustine wondered how the leaps of faith, religious experiences, and inspirations that beset man's quest for God could be the product of only a one-sided attempt by man to reach the divinity. How could a God that was so good and perfect be completely disinterested in the struggles of men who ostensibly partially share his nature by virtue of their souls? Augustine could not, in other words, accept that his own struggle for God was ultimately meaningless or merely a means to an end. He wanted the struggle itself to have some meaning or to be absorbed into the solution. In the same way, the omnipotence of the Deity that Augustine sought also demanded that His actions have a purpose. He needed to reconcile the error that exists within the world with the perfection of God that the order of the universe and the intelligibility of the conceptual world seemed to imply. How could a truly omniscient God have permitted, Augustine wondered, all of these material shortcomings if they were not part of a plan or higher aim?⁵⁶ Augustine would come to realize that, as Peter King writes, the "explanation of the fall should be logically tied to the possibility of ascent" (King 2010: XIV). The purpose of existence with all its perils and disappointments, quite simply, could not be, as it had been for the Neo-Platonists, merely to allow for the elite members of an exclusive philosophy to ascend sporadically to some transcendent divinity.

Finding the Solution in the Christian God

Augustine took a leave of absence in the summer of 386 after being at the imperial court for around a year and a half. With a group of close friends and his mother Monica, who by now had traveled to Italy, Augustine would spend the next six months in a country villa in Cassiciacum, just outside Milan.⁵⁷ At Cassiciacum Augustine attempted to undertake the Neo-Platonic program of meditation and study, but found it too onerous and ephemeral. He felt as if he had reached the perfection of the One on several occasions yet each time inevitably returned

⁵⁶ For the Neo-Platonists to ask the question of why the less perfect and material needed to exist as an emanation of the ideal would have been as pointless and self-evident as asking why birds fly or why two arms are necessary when one would probably suffice, the answer is that this is just undeniably how things are and were evidently meant to be by virtue of the existence of the forms themselves.

⁵⁷ There Augustine and his companions gathered to discuss philosophy and religious ideas. Augustine by this time had grown disenchanted with his duties at the court, he felt that his life was unfulfilling and that success had failed to bring him any sense of happiness. He had already made the decision "to retire from my post as a salesman of words in the markets of rhetoric" but he lacked a sense of where his life was headed (Augustine 1992: 155; *Confessions* IX, 2).

from the experience back to the old sinful thoughts of which he was so ashamed. These experiences failed to enact the "sustained conversion" from the material to the spiritual that he so vehemently pursued (Brachtendorf 2010: 6). At Cassiciacum judging by his preservation of some of the conversations had by his circle in the *Dialogues*, retrospectively composed after his conversion of course, Augustine seems to have reached the conclusion that Christianity offered all the benefits but none of the defects of Neo-Platonism described above.⁵⁸

As we saw with Ambrose's sermons, the circle around Augustine at Cassiciacum and at the court in Milan were at this time the proponents of the most intellectually sophisticated form of Christianity then available. These elite Roman Christians applied Neo-Platonic philosophy to Christian doctrine by associating its tenets on the One and the intelligibility of the forms to Christ and the Logos. It is important to realize that in the Later Roman Empire Christianity was the intellectual movement *par excellence*. The Church and its doctrine promised to offer, by very consciously casting itself in opposition to the prevailing culture while yet retaining what was thought to be its best aspects, the hope of a new future and a resolution to the intellectual and spiritual difficulties plaguing the people of Late Antiquity. In all these senses Christianity occupied a position directly analogous to Marxism in European intellectual circles in the first half of the twentieth century, it was at the cutting edge of thought and perhaps even of what was "cool" (Veyne 2010: 48-49). Christ held out the promise of achieving an actual correspondence—rather than a periodic communing through intensive philosophical study and meditation, between otherness and the self—and so the making good of man's fundamental exclusion from the higher, perfect, and secure world of the intelligibility of the forms. Christ had come to Earth and been made flesh so that he could bring the word of God to everyone on Earth, the truth of being. For the Christians in contrast to the pagan model of the Sage who effaces himself before the One, and so becomes nothing, was Christ Himself. In Christian terms God debased Himself for man. He had come to Earth as a man in the Incarnation to build a bridge for man back to intelligibility and perfection. Augustine came to the realization at Cassiciacum through his failure to get to the One that because there can be no intermediate stages between material reality and the omnipotent—because God was so much higher and so incapable of being influenced in any way by the material—that man could not hope to reach the

⁵⁸ As he writes in the Neo-Platonic books "I read, not of course in these words, but with entirely the same sense and supported by numerous and varied reasons, 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God'" (Augustine 1992: 121; *Confessions* VII, 13).

divine of his own accord but required a mediator to lift him to salvation. He found such a mediator in Christ whose miraculous birth and resurrection showed that He was both human and divine and so could bridge the gap that separated the two (Deane 1963: 23).

And it was belief in Christ through membership in the Church that He established and the emulation of His deeds by mere mortals, so far as was possible, that could thereby act as the link between the intelligible world of man's soul and intellect and the divine that was so clearly beyond him. This belief enabled the Christian, no matter how humble, to permanently attain through faith and grace what the Platonists could reach only in serendipitous moments through intensive practice and study.⁵⁹ The promise of perfection through membership in the Church was awarded through baptism not through a laborious process of humanist learning. All that was necessary for redemption was belief in that which was at the basis of the Logos, it was not necessary for man to attempt to come to it. The task of redemption was thrust upon God and taken to be a matter of His initiative thus taking away the burden of responsibility from Late Antique men, who were becoming more and more aware of their failure to achieve this on their own.⁶⁰ As opposed to a program of self-help, then, as Gilson writes, "Christianity's great superiority consisted in the fact that it was not the simple abstract knowledge of truth, but an efficacious method of salvation" (Gilson 1940: 25).

But for Augustine it was precisely this blind faith that was problematic, raw belief in the reality of historical events, i.e. the Incarnation and the Resurrection, from which the entirety of Christianity's promise to man flowed. He could not bring himself to simply believe in Christ because his mindset was at this time still so heavily rooted in the intellectual assumptions of Greco-Roman civilization.⁶¹ He could not get past his own intellectualism and wanted to find a doctrine, as we saw, that could provide certainty through the efforts of his own rational mind.

⁵⁹ "A Christian may be unacquainted with the writings of the philosophers; he may employ in debate words which he has never learnt... It does not follow that he fails to realize that we derive from one true God of all goodness the nature with which we were created in his image" (Augustine 2003: 313)

⁶⁰ And in so doing the belief in Christ, "whose incarnation makes possible human redemption through grace... (offered) solutions to problems that pagan Neo-Platonism was not able to solve" (King 2010: XIV). Moreover, and essentially, for the Christians because of God's active interest in man, the goodness of the bridge that Christ built for their redemption was potentially and "democratically" open to all Christians merely by virtue of belief, regardless of theological understanding or education. The intensive intellectual work required to ultimately touch the divine as in pagan philosophy was not in itself needed by the faithful.

⁶¹ "I had a different notion, since I thought of Christ my Lord only as a man of excellent wisdom which none could equal... I had only realized from the writings handed down concerning him that he ate and drank, slept, walked, was filled with joy, was sad, conversed... If the writings about him were wrong in so describing him, everything else would be suspected of being a lie, and there would remain no salvation for the human race" (Augustine 1992: 128-129; *Confessions* VII, XIX).

As just mentioned, the intellectual milieu in which Augustine's theology emerged saw the world as an eternal and harmonious self-evident organism. It is essential to realize here that this implied to pagan philosophy that the material world was innately corrupted; God was higher and man connected to the divine only via his mind. They had no expectation that a totalistic system could hope to overcome every defect in existence for the simple reason that these defects were viewed as natural because degraded emanations of the divine or what have you. Likewise, the path to the divine and the certain was for the pagans taken to be individualized. There was no plan for reality, no larger scheme of deliverance, man was just another creature in existence, albeit an exceptional one. And for this reason the world was in need of transcending not of solving. The onus was on man to make the journey to God, to rise above the world through his own efforts by emphasizing the divine characteristics of his mind taken as evidence of this capability.⁶² Simple belief then was scorned by the prevailing non-Christian culture with which Augustine was so familiar, not simply because it was deemed to be within the purview of the ignorant, but because it seemed to run against the notion that ascending to the divine could only be the product of individual effort. It was, consequently, the Christian emphasis on belief through revelation as a fundamental tenet of their creed that was especially disturbing for pagan intellectuals (Dodds 1965:121).⁶³

Soon after leaving Cassiciacum, back at Milan, Augustine and his friend Alypius had a visit from a fellow African named Pontitianus. He told them of the beneficial impact on his own life of reading the *Life of Saint Anthony*, the biography of a hermit in Egypt who had died shortly before Augustine's birth. The story of Anthony's renunciation and self-sacrifice in the pursuit of God was at this time inspiring people to convert to Christianity throughout the Roman world. Pontitianus's account of Anthony's control over his own body and emotions filled Augustine with

⁶² Porphyry, for instance, had argued that there was no sure way back to the One and that each journey to reconciliation with the basis of existence would depend on the individual. For the Neo-Platonists by no means was everyone thought capable of becoming a Sage, and it was never intended that a day would arise when this would be the case because the One could entertain no ultimate plan for a global human redemption. Spirituality was a rare achievement, a "personal quest for God," as Dodds phrases it, obtained through years of intense and total practice by definition open only to an elite few with time and money to spare (Dodds 1965: 91).

⁶³ As Brown writes, quoting Porphyry, for the pagans, Christian claims to enjoy "direct communion with the One God of the universe... (was) such an over evaluation of their persons" that it amounted to an attempt "to overturn the established hierarchy of the universe. Mere human beings were to know their place, far below the stars; they must not claim that they could brush aside the gods who minister to them from the distant heavens." Christians were like "frogs holding counsel round a marsh, or worms assembling in some filthy corner, saying "God has even deserted the whole world and the motions of the heavens and disregarded the vast earth to give attention to us alone." They are like worms that say "There is God first, and we are next after Him in rank... and all things exist for our benefit" (Brown 1988: 176).

a sense of sadness and shame at his own seeming lack of direction and inability to control what he considered the baser elements of his own nature.⁶⁴ Augustine realized at that moment that all his learning had brought him no closer to the God that he had sought for so long, to the "truth," and that even simple men like Saint Anthony had seemingly come closer to the transcendent than he could have ever hoped through sheer faith and devotion. He felt as if no "advantage" had come to him "from the fact that I had by myself read and understood all the books I could get hold of... I enjoyed reading them, though I did not know the source of what was true and certain in them" (Augustine 1992: 70; *Confessions* IV, 30). After Pontitianus departed Augustine apparently went out to the courtyard garden of the house where he was staying. Feeling utterly defeated in his desire to escape the confusion of the material realm he threw himself under a fig tree and cried tears of frustration. It was at that moment that he heard a boy singing in the distance "*tolle, lege*," which can be translated as "pick it up, read it." He immediately returned to the house and seized the Epistles of Paul that he had been studying earlier. Opening its pages his eyes settled on the words "not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts" (Augustine 1992: 153; *Confessions* VIII, 29). And after this, struck by lightning as it were, he was a changed man. He knew what he had to do. His search was over, "it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled" (Augustine 1992: 153; *Confessions* VIII, 29). And Augustine was duly baptised by Ambrose during the Easter Vigil on April 24, 387 seemingly ending his intellectual search.⁶⁵

Following his experience in the garden Augustine found his faith, the will to believe. At that moment he acutely felt a sense of his own personal failure, his inability to ascend to something higher of his own accord via the exercise of an autonomous human reason. He realized perhaps that otherness or otherness, the lack of certainty that he so wanted to overcome, was an inextricable component of man's own mind and experience, that the promise of individualized transcendence in Greco-Roman philosophy was a fallacy. But his desire for transcendence was so pronounced that, rather than seize a positive implication from this by

⁶⁴ "Vain trifles and the triviality of the empty-headed, my old loves, held me back" (Augustine 1992: 151; *Confessions* VIII, 26)

⁶⁵ After his conversion experience, as he writes, "with avid intensity I seized the sacred writings of your Spirit and especially the apostle Paul. Where at one time I used to think he contradicted himself and the text of his words disagreed with the testimonies of the law and the prophets, the problems simply vanished... I began reading and found that all the truth I had read in the Platonists was stated here together with the commendation of your grace" (Augustine 1992: 131; *Confessions* VII, 27).

respecting otherness itself, he immediately threw himself, via blind faith, onto a system of belief that promised to have all the answers. We cannot blame him of course. He was so desperate for a path to transcendence and his conversion experience, even if perhaps later embellished, was by no means at odds with the intensely spiritual nature of the man's character, and so must have been sincere. Yet the double movement which the conversion represents, of doubt about man's own capacity to find truth combined with faith in a system that promises perfection, this dyad which, as we shall see, is so central to Augustine and his search for certainty, would have enormous implications once he worked out its full meaning several decades after this initial moment of faith. Augustine would later discover what I would perhaps call a system of "true" or "total" faith. He came to conceive of even the act of believing, in the sense of volition, as itself tainted by man's failure to rise to the transcendent of his own accord. He would come to believe that deliverance from uncertainty in this way, could come from no act of man but only through total obedience, total surrender to something higher than the self.

Augustine's spiritual catharsis would lead him to jettison the emphasis on an individualized search that prevailed in Greco-Roman philosophy for one based on faith. He would come to believe that the greatness and immutability of an omnipotent divinity necessitated that he could only be taken by man in one way and so approached by only one true path (Brachtendorf 2010: 8). Intellect would become a path for belief in the divine, rather than the *sine qua non* of arriving at it. As Augustine writes, he now "thought it more modest and not in the least misleading to be told by the Church to believe what could not be demonstrated... rather than... to have a rash promise of knowledge with mockery of mere belief" (Augustine 1992: 95; *Confessions* VI, 7). He came to realize that, incontrovertibly and unavoidably, man's experience was based largely on that which could only be believed but never definitively known.⁶⁶ Man's limitations meant that he had to accept his state under God and in this way through an act of God's grace, but not through an evidently flawed human volition, man could hope to eventually touch a wisdom that he was incapable of coming to on his own. And it was Augustine's lack of confidence in man, in what we might call his capacity for agency or self-determination, that drove him to this conclusion. As Gilson writes "if we reduce St. Augustine to his essence

⁶⁶ Otherwise "we should not know that there are lands and cities which the most celebrated fame commends; we would not know of the men and their works which we have learned in the reading of history; we would not know the news that is daily brought to us from everywhere... finally, we would not know in what places and from what persons we were born" (Augustine 2002: 192; *De Trinitate* 15, 12).

alone... he is a man in his yearning to be self-sufficient... (his) inner experience is precisely the experience of this ambition and its failure. His doctrine is this and fundamentally nothing more" (Gilson 1967: 240).

Not long after his conversion, Augustine set about ridding himself of worldly things and returned to Thagaste with the intention of forming a monastic community.⁶⁷ But circumstance soon intervened to draw him back into the world. In 389 while visiting a friend in the nearby city of Hippo Regius he was essentially press ganged by the population into becoming a priest of their congregation, an act which was by no means unusual for the period.⁶⁸ Augustine asked for time to prepare for the ministry and this was granted with his actual ordination coming in 391. Once he entered the clergy, owing to his rhetorical training, his fame soon spread, making him one of the most sought after churchmen in North Africa. In 396 he became the Bishop of Hippo Regius, a post he would occupy until his death in 430.

The Church to which Augustine had eagerly sought membership, and then found a position of leadership, was one whose parishioners, after Constantine's conversion, had begun to believe that the Empire and their faith were one and the same. In the hostile pagan climate prior to Constantine's conversion, the Christians had endeavoured to associate themselves with all that was best in human endeavour so as to legitimize the new faith in the eyes of the pagans by portraying it as the natural culmination of human history. In this light, the timing of Christ's alleged birth, close to the beginning of the Empire with the peace and stability that it seemed to bring to the world, was taken to be of the greatest significance.⁶⁹ The early Christian apologists had also wanted to depict their religion as the embodiment or fulfillment of the universal moral goods championed by pagan philosophy. They attempted to ground Christian belief in the

⁶⁷ Augustine remained in Milan for about six months after his conversion. His work as a rhetorician at the imperial court was now a thing of the past and he resolved to travel with his close friends, mother, and son back to Thagaste to form a Christian community. On their return to Africa, Augustine's party got waylaid at Ostia, Rome's port, owing to civil strife. It was there that on November 13, 387 Monica died, profoundly affecting Augustine as he records in the *Confessions*. Augustine spent the next year in Rome waiting for the war to end, during which time he occupied himself by attacking his former friends and patrons the Manichees. He had now come to see their promise of total knowledge for man through his intellect as mirroring the serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden, "for no men promise more loquaciously and boastfully the knowledge of good and evil... In general, all heretics deceive by the promise of knowledge and find fault with those whom they find believing in all simplicity" (Augustine 2010: 135; *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees* 2.25.38).

⁶⁸ The same thing had, of course, happened to Saint Ambrose in Milan.

⁶⁹ As Mommsen writes "the conviction that the appearance of Christ had led to a general improvement of the material conditions of the world and that its universal acceptance will lead to a still greater progress, was set forth by Melito and Tertullian, by Origen and Arnobius. When in the reign of Constantine, the great turning-point arrived and Christianity was not only tolerated but became the religion most favoured by the emperor, it was natural that hope for progress was still higher" (Mommsen 1995: 362).

assumptions of the Greco-Roman world, and so give it the all important lineage that it required in this traditional society, by arguing that the coming of their faith had been foretold or hinted at in various ways by the pagan philosophers and law givers of old. For these reasons, the Early Church Fathers were hesitant to stray too much from the humanist assumptions of the Classical world by discussing the corruption of man at the fall of Adam and Eve, or any deficiency in man's ability to reason or reach for the divine through his own intellectual efforts (Harrison 2007: 31). They could not envision a world in which man was completely severed from the divine. Man's error, in this conception, arose, as for the pagan philosophers, principally from circumstance and so was changeable by men operating upon themselves, namely through discarding the material in favour of a higher spiritual existence.^{70 71}

And Augustine initially seems to have accepted many of the Church's more progressive teachings about man's original spiritual condition and of his ability to return to a purer state closer to God under the Church's guidance via faith in Christ. In *De Vera Religione*, a work written not long after his conversion and shortly before he became a priest, Augustine argued, much like the other fathers, that the destiny of Rome paralleled the success of Christianity and that the Christian faith was the fulfillment of pagan philosophy. In so doing, and in a way very different from the position that he would adopt in his more mature works, Augustine drew the history of secular events into the supposedly sacred history of Christianization.⁷²

⁷⁰ Eusebius, for instance, had argued that the dominance of Christianity would progressively usher in a just political and moral order achievable by men working under divine guidance which would open a path toward the ultimate spiritual deliverance of man (Bourke 1995: 313). In his *Praeparatio evangelica* Eusebius discusses how further improvements of man and nature were intertwined and dependent on the adoption and further diffusion of Christianity (Mommsen 1995: 364-365). The dominance of the Church in tandem with the power of the Empire were thereby envisioned as together laying the groundwork for God's divine kingdom on Earth that would culminate in Christ's return on Judgement Day. Men such as Eusebius genuinely believed that wars were ending as the stability of the world increased in preparation for the return of Christ (Mommsen 1995: 366).

⁷¹ Decades later Ambrose too would repeat much the same line by taking the position that a Christian future could only serve to improve on the past. In his rebuttal to Symmachus' altar of victory speech, and in diametric opposition to all that Classical culture was rooted in, there was no need to revere the traditions of the ancestors "why should we do so?" he rhetorically asked, now that Christianity had pointed the way to what would be an inevitably better future "has not everything made advances in the course of time toward what is better?" (Glover 1984: 190).⁷¹

⁷² With the zeal of a convert Augustine had "come under the spell of the exhilaration over Christian triumph and echoed the general sentiments of his contemporaries" (Markus 2006: 36).

Augustine's Solution to Otherness

The 390s represent the setting in of the twilight of the Roman Empire in the Western Mediterranean. The death of the last Emperor of the entire Roman World in 395, Theodosius, led to the permanent division of the Empire between his two sons, both still in childhood, Arcadius in the East and Honorius in the West. A period replete with internal rivalry, barbarian invasion, and social instability followed. For Augustine and his contemporaries the world that had seemed so unshakeable in his youth and early adulthood suddenly took on the appearance of an unstable façade. Widespread turmoil and insurrection, the flight of the landlords to their country estates, the decline of the cities, all served to compound the financial problems caused by the Empire's exorbitant military costs and its perennial need to buy off the barbarian tribes, and this in turn further perpetuated, in a vicious cycle, the decay of public works, a weakening of imperial authority, and a growing sense of insecurity (Brown 1967: 37). All of these features of the later Western Empire henceforth became more or less permanent features of Augustine's world (Rist 1994: 203-204; Deane 1963: 4).⁷³

In addition to this, after he had become a priest, and then a bishop, one of Augustine's principle challenges was the Donatist heresy. Donatism had arisen during the last great persecution of Christians by Diocletian in the 290s. It had built upon earlier strains of North African Christianity and in Augustine's time continued to dominate in the countryside (Markus 1970: 111). The Donatists essentially rejected the ability of those who had apostatized during the persecution to give communion. The Donatists maintained that the purity of their Church—precisely its ability to actually offer salvation—had been retained while the mainstream Church, through welcoming back those who had lapsed, had become corrupted by sin (Markus 1970: 112). Through his efforts to combat Donatism Augustine would come to believe that any claim to have purity while on Earth was hubristic and an affront to the salvation and goodness that he believed only God could bring (Deane 1963: 34-35). He now appreciated "the sheer difficulty of achieving an ideal life... Above all, there was the burning problem of the apparent permanence of evil in human actions" (Brown 1967: 148).

⁷³ As Rist suggests, this "growing awareness of political and social instability" no doubt motivated him to extensively revisit his essentially optimistic philosophical and theological views on man's capacity to reach God (Rist 1994: 204).

Augustine's experiences in Italy, his inability to come to the divine of his own accord, the challenges posed by the Donatists and others, and the more intellectually flexible space of the African Church would together lead him to develop a highly original theology that emphasized God's grace alone, to the exclusion of autonomous human action, as the solution to the theological and philosophical problems of his time. As mentioned for Plotinus and Porphyry the material world was not in itself evil, as it had been for most of the Church Fathers; it was merely the lower element in an eternal world. Evil entered into the world when the lower portions of reality turned away from the higher, that on which they actually drew their existence, and so became degraded or corrupted. Augustine too began to have his doubts about the material world's apparent evilness. He re-read Paul, whose *Epistles* inspired his conversion in the Garden, and came to the conclusion that the world of nature had to be good since it was created by a perfectly good God.⁷⁴ Augustine came to reject the notion that the body was somehow inferior to the soul as prevailed in the Christian dogma of his time. This was especially the case for human sexuality. For Augustine sex itself now appeared not to be bad, rather the loss of control over the self during the sexual act, or when one is driven by lust, came to embody man's inability to understand and exercise a more perfect understanding and control over the world of which the divine characteristics of his mind clearly suggested he ought to be able.^{75 76}

After his theology matured and his ideas had time to percolate, Augustine would take his own sense of personal failure, his inability to come to the transcendent of his own accord, to its logical conclusion. He would extend his own sense of intellectual and spiritual inadequacy to mankind as such. He would realize that the material world as a creation of God could not in itself be bad, and that for this reason all of its errors, and so man's inability to solve them through transcendence, stemmed not from extraneous factors such as God's supposed absence from the world or to its inherently inferior character, but exclusively to the actions of man himself. Man could not come to God of his own volition through any kind of action, Augustine reasoned,

⁷⁴ Addressing God Augustine writes in his *Confessions* that the world was "given form through your likeness.... And all things are very good whether they abide close to you or, in the graded hierarchy of being, stand farther away from you in time and space" (Augustine 1992: 267; *Confessions* XII, 38).

⁷⁵ This change of perspective on the material world and sexuality demonstrated an extraordinary independence of mind given the long running assumptions of his time (Markus 1990: 59). The change is even more remarkable when one considers how drastically it departed from the progressive ideas discussed above which more or less completely dominated Church theology in Augustine's day (Glover 1994: 190).

⁷⁶ As Augustine wrote, and as would become the "core" of his thought, "I do not want my flesh to be removed from me forever, as if it were something alien to me, but that it be healed, a whole with me" (Augustine Sermon 30, cited in Rist 1994: 92).

because even this act would itself be tainted by the human failure which he so ardently felt in himself. Even belief would, he now understood, be sullied through its continued emphasis on human activity. Augustine realized that any continued reliance on man himself would subvert the basis of "true" faith, that is to say of the total surrender to God which Christianity itself dictated. Men could only hope to come to God, to achieve certainty, in other words, through a total submission to something which came wholly at the price of their own activity or agency. Salvation could only come through the acknowledgment that man was nothing in comparison to this something that promised him deliverance and that every one of his actions was tainted in some way to the point of being himself literally the cause of everything in existence that could be construed as in error. And it would be the notion that there is a need for man's absolute submission to a system when combined with the idea that this system can offer him total deliverance through, paradoxically, actually eliminating or limiting his activity, that I will maintain in this work is the central and perhaps decisive contribution made by Augustine to Western thought.

It was consequently the world produced by man, human action, that in Augustine's mind came henceforth to be solely responsible for sin. Augustine came to perceive the optimistic ideas about human agency, which he had initially accepted both in Neo-Platonism and in the Church about man's ability to attain virtue and perfection through his own effort, as found most explicitly in the writings of his archrival Pelagius and later Julian of Eclanum, as having one foot in the tenets of the Classical past—that man lives in a world of his own creation—and another in a future striving, and destined, for some kind of permanent connection to certainty and the transcendent. As he writes of the Classical world, all its "philosophers have wished, with annoying folly, to be happy here on earth and to achieve bliss by their own efforts," but this is an impossibility, "for who is competent, however torrential the flow of his eloquence, to unfold all the miseries of this life?... ugliness despoils his beauty, sickness his health; weakness subdues his strength, lassitude or lethargy his mobility" (Augustine 2003: 852). Augustine saw that the path to something omniscient and transcendent, to something certain and perfect above man's experience, could not be found in man's own activity. He saw that the Classical world's comfort in humanism when combined with the desire for some connection to a transcendent was an either/or proposition that both positions could not be maintained. The humanists wanted to have it both ways. They wanted to be capable of their own volition of reaching a realm entirely beyond the

vicissitudes of man's existence, and so capable of offering him deliverance, yet to which man was still capable of ascending through his own efforts. But Augustine alone perceived what the others had failed to understand that such a view would imply a capacity to use the force of one's own will to paradoxically cancel itself out, and that in trying to reach God through their own effort, they failed to realize that their ability to do so, to touch Him through their own imperfect experience, would render Him insufficiently transcendent and so would fail to provide a certain and reliable connection to salvation.

Augustine could not be satisfied with the half measures and half solutions to the problems that affected him so keenly, as he found them in the Church and in pagan philosophy. And in this sense his life and beliefs were emblematic of the search of his age for something permanent and true. Like his contemporaries he presupposed that God, in the form of an omnipotent and transcendent Deity, existed and acknowledged his own failure to come to Him. From this he realized that the Divine would itself have to take the initiative to purify man, that He alone could have agency because any attempt on man's part to reach Him would be doomed to failure. He took the fateful step, in other words, of attributing the imperfection that characterizes human experience not simply to the nature of existence itself, as had been the case previously, but to man. As Gilson again writes, Augustine "observed with remarkable metaphysical penetration... (that) it is not enough, to transcend man to reach such a being (God). We must transcend something in man which is such that only God can lie beyond it" (Gilson 1967:15). He realized uniquely among his contemporaries, and this is the essential point to which this chapter has been building, that the only certain path to that which was perfect and true, which everything in his theological and philosophical milieu presupposed existed and cried out for, could be found in locating the apparent absence of these things in human existence to the actions of man himself. Not in the sense that man failed to understand how he ought to live as the pagans had believed, but in a much more fundamental one in that man alone was literally, actually, responsible, not just for his inability to escape from all of the degradation of the base and material to which he was subject, but for the actual existence of this corruption beyond his own physical self. And it was in this way that man's salvation—his path to something transcendent and true, which for the pagans was implicitly unknowable to man at least while embodied by virtue of his manhood—could become assured. This is because when the problem of otherness was seen to be attributable to man, to not have been man's original or intended state,

it first became possible to believe that it was solvable through man's conformity to a system or standard. A reliable, secure, and certain bridge could only be built to perfection, to something presumed to be beyond man's own reality, to something transcendent and therefore beyond human understanding, when the onus for the severance was placed on man himself, rather than on the unknowable, because omniscient, divine quantity. This would provide man not with the hope of achieving an ephemeral and transitory solution to otherness in the form of some serendipitous reconciliation with God, which for Augustine was always unsatisfactory, but rather one which he and his contemporaries had sought so dearly, one that was sure, undeniable, total and permanent, the plausible promise of a definitive solution to otherness through making man himself the cause of it.

With this perspective Augustine made otherness his pre-eminent ideological and intellectual concern and located its cause, the failure of man to obtain his intended image, within man's actions themselves. Man became, not simply divided from what was unknown to him, but responsible for his own inability to know. As Augustine would write, "All these evils belong to man in his wickedness, and they all spring from that root of error and perverted affection which every son of Adam brings with him, at his birth. For who is not aware of the vast ignorance of truth... which accompanies a man on his entrance into the world" (Augustine 2003: 1065). It was man's failure to abide by his own true nature which would now be the cause of all that exceeds him; "his wretchedness is nothing but his own disobedience to himself," i.e. to his authentic nature (Augustine 2003: 575). And consequently by placing the cause of error on man himself arose the expectation that man was originally meant to know the world in its entirety as it is, that this was his intended or natural state, and that his inability to know the world in this way was an aberration. Man's salvation, therefore, his path to something beyond the vagaries of the otherness that overshadows his experience, which for the pagans was implicitly unknowable to man or simply a product of the imperfections of the material world, to a total reconciliation with rather than mere transcendence of existence, could become assured. In placing the onus on man as the sole cause of error, rather than on him as responsible for his own redemption, Augustine paradoxically cleared a path to God.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ As Mulhull writes, the doctrine of original sin "locates the cause of our problems in human hands... but it does so in such a way that the solution to that problem remains necessarily beyond our unaided grasp, and thereby prevents us from thinking of our natural state as merely imperfect" (Mulhull 2009: 9).

The Fall of Rome and the City of God

Augustine realized, uniquely, that if the world had an end goal, as the Church maintained, then it must have been created for a purpose by an omnipotent God who could only do good. He took the momentous step of coming to understand that the material and the spiritual realms could not be innately severed, because otherwise this would have rendered God himself, along with his material creation, in error, i.e. the cause of this debasement. Man simply thinks that they are separate because of his error, because he has caused it and because he fails to understand himself. And man's belief that he can ascend from the material to something higher, that they are inherently separate, in Augustine's mind, merely served to perpetuate this error. Believing in other words in otherness at all, otherness of any kind, that it ultimately exists beyond man, only repeats the error that causes it in the first place.⁷⁸ The ideal opportunity for Augustine to comprehensively outline his vision of a material and spiritual world divided not inherently but by the actions of men, presented itself in 410 when, in an event that shocked the entire Roman world, the Visigoth king Alaric famously sacked Rome.⁷⁹ It is hard for a modern person to understand the degree to which Rome was *the* city in the Mediterranean world at the end of the Classical Era. In the context of an empire that was roughly ten percent urbanized, meaning perhaps ten to fifteen million people, counting even the towns, it was easily twice as large as its closest rival, possessing at its peak somewhere between one to two million inhabitants.⁸⁰ But beyond its sheer size, Rome had also been embellished during the Empire with monuments and other public buildings whose lavishness and scale defy description even today.

In a civilization that identified city life with living a human existence, living in close proximity to one's fellows in a place where culture was readily available, Rome was the embodiment of these values *par excellence*. It had the best educational institutions, antiquity's best known historical and religious artefacts, and the most impressive places of entertainment. Its highly multicultural ethnic makeup made Rome a sort of microcosm of the entirety of human achievement, its name was synonymous with the world itself (Markus 1970: 26). It was a city

⁷⁸ Augustine's vision is of a different and more all-encompassing kind of human redemption "one which joins God not only to the human intellect but to the life of the body and of the imagination as well" (Russell 1995: 409).

⁷⁹ Rome had last been partially taken by a foreign army during a Gallic incursion some 800 years previously. At that time it was a mere village, but by the time of Augustine and his contemporaries it was the undisputed mistress of the world and had been for almost five centuries.

⁸⁰ Given the higher population and greater degree of urbanization in the modern world a poor comparison would perhaps be if the top ten cities of today with their several hundred million inhabitants were rolled into one.

that had single-handedly conquered the entire world and so was commonly believed to have brought it out of barbarism and to a state of peace and civilization and as such its existence "symbolized the security of a whole civilized way of life" (Brown 1967: 289).⁸¹ ⁸² As Barrow writes, for men bred to equate Rome with humanity itself its fall "came as a shattering blow. Romanitas, the proud tradition painfully and triumphantly built up for more than a thousand years, was crumbling away before their eyes, and the future, hitherto filled with the destiny of Rome, was a void, offering only chaos and uncertainty and perhaps extinction" (Barrow 1950: 191-192).

It is for this reason that, even though at the time of its fall Rome was perhaps the last major urban bastion of paganism the "Vatican of paganism," the Christians that we see reacting to the disaster do not gloat over the destruction of the city as if it were an enemy. The gravity of the loss, the cultural and intellectual impact, the feeling of having the ground cut from under one's feet on which the entire edifice of civilization rested, was lost on no one.⁸³ And Augustine too realized what was at stake in Rome's fall.⁸⁴ The stream of refugees, many of whom were pagan, escaping Italy for North Africa carried with them not just news of the fall but also resentment over a disaster that they believed was caused by the neglect of the traditional gods. Augustine was mindful of the mounting pagan criticism and Christian disillusionment

⁸¹ All roads literally did lead to Rome in antiquity, to the center of the city where its ceremonial "navel" stone was located, and it was from this point that the distance to every corner of the Empire was measured. Even the calendar in use throughout the Roman world dated each year from the time of Rome's supposed foundation in 753 B.C.

⁸² It was a "momentous date in the intellectual history of the Western world," because it shattered the Greco-Roman worldview, it forced a fundamental re-evaluation of ancient notions of history and progress and of the essentially static nature of reality (Mommsen 1995: 353). From Virgil to Ammianus Marcellinus, Rome's depiction as eternal is a theme that constantly reoccurs in ancient literature (Mommsen 1995: 353). Antiquity's belief in an eternal natural world, a sort of constant world in continuous equilibrium with itself for all time, was paralleled by the belief that the Roman Empire, as far as human affairs were concerned, was eternal. Rome's fall in 410 then went far beyond the material consequences of the event, which most agree today were minor, rather it was a date of tremendous import in the history of the Western world because it shattered the Greco-Roman worldview, it forced a fundamental re-evaluation of ancient notions of history and of the essentially static nature of reality.

⁸³ As Augustine's contemporary Saint Jerome perhaps most memorably wrote of the disaster it was as if "the brightest light in the whole world was extinguished... (as if) the whole world perished in one city... (then) I was dumb with silence."

⁸⁴ As he would write in response to the fall, "Those who made such a promise to earthly kingdoms were not governed by the truth but were lying in order to flatter. One of their poets brought in Jupiter speaking, and had him say of the Romans: To these I set no bounds of space or time; Dominion without end have I bestowed. That, obviously, is not the answer that truth gives. This kingdom which you have bestowed without end, O you that have bestowed precisely nothing, is it on earth or in heaven? On earth, of course. And even if it were in heaven, *Heaven and earth shall pass away* (Lk 21:33). What God himself made shall pass away; how much more rapidly what Romulus founded?" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/4, 94; Sermon 105, 10).

engendered by the fall when he began in 413 to seriously write the definitive culmination of his thought in the *City of God*.⁸⁵

But in the *City of God* Augustine would not simply try to defend the idea of Christian times as a positive against pagan attacks but rather shifted the entire argument away from secular considerations (Markus 1970: 42).⁸⁶ Augustine was now nearly fifty and had been a churchman for almost twenty years. The work provided him with the perfect starting point to bring together the conclusions that he had reached over the decades of his own intellectual search concerning the place of man and the value of human things.⁸⁷ It was important for Augustine not just to rally the morale of his fellow Christians to forestall possible pagan inroads, as he did in the work's first half by demonstrating that events that were considerably worse than the fall had occurred throughout history, but most especially to make people aware of the need to draw the correct conclusions about the demise of Rome specifically.⁸⁸ The danger posed by the sack of Rome, Augustine would argue, was not in the disaster itself but in the response taken to it by the Romans,⁸⁹ that is to say in their failure to learn from the catastrophe by changing their sinful

⁸⁵ As he would describe the context of its composition in his *Retractions*, a sort of late in life summary and outline of the motives and principal arguments of all of his writings, "Rome was destroyed... The worshippers of many false gods, whom we call by the customary name pagans, attempting to attribute its destruction to the Christian religion, began to blaspheme the true God more sharply and bitterly than usual... I decided to write the books, On the City of God, in opposition to their blasphemies and errors" (Augustine 1968: 209; *Retractions* 69.1).

⁸⁶ "'But he shouldn't say these things about Rome," people have been saying about me. "Oh, if only he would shut up about Rome!" As though I were hurling taunts, and not rather interceding with the Lord, and in whatever way I can encouraging you. Far be it from me to hurl taunts... So what am I saying, when I don't shut up about Rome, other than what they say about our Christ is false, that it's he that has ruined Rome... Golden gods and wooden gods differ greatly in value; in having eyes and not seeing they are all of a piece. There you have the sort of guardians to whom learned men have entrusted Rome, having eyes and unable to see" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/4, 95-96; Sermon 105, 12).

⁸⁷ As Markus writes, his response to the disaster in what would become the *City of God* would allow Augustine "to delineate his theology of the two cities, long ago conceived as symbolising the primordial forces at work in human affairs, but only gradually brought to bear on the problem of 'Rome'" (Markus 1970: 63).

⁸⁸ "The world is devastated, the press is trodden. Come now, Christians, heavenly seed, strangers on earth who seek a city in heaven, who long to associate with the holy angels, understand that you have come here simply in order to take your departure. You are passing through the world, striving toward him who created the world. Don't let the lovers of the world disturb you, those who wish to remain in the world, and willy-nilly are compelled to emigrate from it; don't let them deceive you, or lead you astray. These troubles and pressures are not scandals. Be just, and they will be training exercises. Trouble comes; it will be whichever you wish, your education" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/3, 364; Sermon 81, 7).

⁸⁹ "So, brothers and sisters, don't let our spirits fail within us; an end will come to all earthly kingdoms. If this is the end now, God can see... Fix your hopes on God, long for eternal things, look forward to eternal realities... Why place our hearts on earth, when we can see how the earth is being turned upside down?... Don't let anyone by his discontented grumbling deflect you from your expectation of future blessings" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/4, 95; Sermon 105, 11).

ways.⁹⁰ Rome, that center of human excellence, would optimize for Augustine the worthlessness of man's effort and creations.^{91 92} As Augustine would preach shortly after the fall,

"'There you are,' he says, 'it's Christian times, and Rome is destroyed'... they (the Romans) won't perish, if they praise God; they will, if they blaspheme him... Men put it up, men pulled it down... anything put up by men only collapses when God wishes... God made you a world that would eventually collapse... why be surprised if a city sometimes comes to an end? I beg you, I beseech you, I exhort you all to be meek... Let Christians do what Christ commands, and the blasphemies of the pagans can hurt none but themselves" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/3, 366-367; Sermon 81, 9).

The *City of God* would be Augustine's masterpiece, the culmination and most refined expression of his own search for intellectual and physical peace both with himself and with the external world (van Oort 1987: 87).⁹³ In this work Augustine would implore his countrymen and parishioners not to treat as evil in themselves the disasters and imperfection that overwhelm human life, "such things as famine, disease, war, spoliation, captivity, massacre and the like" but rather to maintain the correct attitude to these challenges in light of human limitations (Augustine 2003: 89). Barrow's suggestion that the work should primarily be seen as a reaction to contemporary events, the work of an apologist writing first and foremost for the "pagan swarms" now flooding into Africa, seems off the mark (Barrow 1950: 191-192). The *City of*

⁹⁰ "What insanity this is! This is not error but plain madness. When, by all accounts, nations in the East were bewailing your catastrophe, when the greatest cities in the farthest parts of the earth were keeping days of public grief, you were asking the way to the theatres... behaving in a much more crazy fashion than before" (Augustine 2003: 44).

⁹¹ And in this light the *City of God* would prove to be the "definitive rejection" both of pagan culture and ancient humanism (Brown 1967: 302) and by extension also of the "dominant narrative" of the Empire's Christianization (Markus 2006: 34-35).

⁹² "Look, brothers, and see these amphitheaters which are now falling into ruin. It was extravagance that built them; you don't suppose, do you, that piety built them? It was nothing but the extravagance of impious men that built them. Don't you want what extravagance built to fall down sometime, so that what piety builds can rise up instead?... And they say, 'How bad the Christian times are!'" Why? Because the place you used to die in is turned upside down for you... My brothers and sisters, he is the doctor, and he knows about cutting off a decaying part, to stop the decay spreading from it to other places. "One finger," he says, "is to be cut off here; because it is better for one finger to be shorn off smooth, than for the whole body to rot." If a human doctor does this by his medical skill, if the art of medicine can remove one part of the body to save them all from decay, why should God not cut out whatever he knows to be rotten in people, so that they may attain to salvation?" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/4, 182; Sermon 113a, 13).

⁹³ This is to the extent that it was only finally completed in 427 some three years before his death during the Vandal siege of Hippo Regius.

God is not a book about the fall of Rome *per se*, the disaster instead permitted Augustine to frame his theological ideas in the form of a confrontation with paganism, with the worldliness of Classical culture, and so was the "careful and premeditated working out, by an old man, of a mounting obsession" (Brown 1967: 312). The City of God, Augustine would show, was man's true home. In contrast to the pagan view of the worldly city that Rome represented, it was the only place where men could ultimately live as men should, and would live on into an eternal, because perfect, future.

As we have seen Augustine took for granted the notion that the apparent order in the workings of the world and the divine component in man's thought, the perfection of his concepts that do not correspond to anything in reality, both suggested the existence of an omniscient divinity after whom his age as a whole also strove. Augustine was also obsessed with man's ability, alone of all creatures, to do evil that is to say to knowingly do what one believes to be wrong. This ability to "sin," to choose the bad demonstrated to Augustine that the soul had originally been intended for good, i.e. for God's perfection, just as blindness shows that the eyes were intended for sight.⁹⁴ As we also saw, Augustine was in addition to this the product of an epistemological tradition which located the source of the stable intelligible world on which human concepts seem to rely in something otherworldly, perfect, and therefore immutable. This perfect something, because of its perfection and therefore greater stability and endurance, was for the Greeks clearly more true and real than what seemingly surrounded man in his material experience. Augustine also wanted to understand how the world could appear meaningful and beautiful to men while at other times only mundane. In his early years, prior to his discovery of Neo-Platonism, Augustine had seen notions such as beauty in purely material terms, as the product of symmetry or proportion.⁹⁵ Now Augustine would recognize that in the experience of something like beauty man could find the model for his true, original and intended, existence (Gilson 1967: 22).

⁹⁴ As he writes "sin is itself the evidence that proves that the nature was created good; for if it itself had not been a great good, although not equal to the Creator, then assuredly this apostasy from God, as from their light, could not have been their evil. We may find an analogy in blindness. Blindness is a defect of the eye, and that in itself indicates that the eye was created for seeing" (Augustine 2003: 1023).

⁹⁵ "I proposed a definition and distinction between the beautiful as that which is pleasing in itself, and the fitting as that which pleases because it fits well into something else. I supported this distinction by examples drawn from the body... The truth with great force leapt to my eyes, but I used to turn away my agitated mind from incorporeal reality to lines and colours and physical magnitudes of vast size" (Augustine 1992: 67; *Confessions* IV, 24).

In the *City of God* Augustine would use history creatively as a means of confronting all of his preoccupations.⁹⁶ He revisited the historiographic assumptions of his contemporaries in a dramatic and profound way. He came to reject any division between a sacred and profane history of men, seeing all human events instead as part of a homogenously sullied carnal existence in which men alike were completely cut off from the divine and in which every element of existence, not just the good or the virtuous, inextricably participated in bringing about man's eventual coming to something higher (Markus 1970: 20-21). He used history not to justify the present order, but to describe how man had become immersed in a world of evil and uncertainty. He used history in a philosophical and creative way to work back to what he believed was the beginning of man himself in his attempt to locate the cause of his expulsion from that original state of perfection. This cause was of course the fall of Adam and Eve and the story that Augustine tells of this fall in the *City of God* uses that "historical" event as a locus on which to project his own existential struggle and inner striving for perfection. Augustine's whole theological program is intertwined with history, and drew its dynamism from this connection. It was through history, a history of the past and of the future, that Augustine found a means of overcoming the aporias of his own time, of accounting for the existence of otherness and so a means of accommodating it.⁹⁷

In the *City of God*, Augustine would, in a novel fashion, absorb all of history, make it synonymous with or incorporate it into God's purposes and wisdom as a means of coming to terms with otherness, of achieving a higher spiritual and material harmony for which he believed man and nature were evidently intended. To put the matter perhaps too plainly, Augustine would use history not just in a manner which reflected what man's relationship to otherness is or was desired to be, and so as I have argued of potentially allowing it to "speak," but of actually

⁹⁶ In his discussion of the structure of the work in his *Retractions*, in the first book of the *City of God* itself, as well as in correspondence dating from the beginning of its composition, Augustine indicated that he wished that its 22 books be taken in 2 parts. The first 10 are polemical and apologetic in character, while the remaining 12 are metaphysical and lay out a comprehensive theology. The first 4 books of the second half, using the story of Adam and Eve as a backdrop or medium for understanding the degraded and imperfect state which man has finds himself in after the fall, discusses the origin of the two cities. The next 4 describe the growth of the separation of the two cities. And finally the concluding 4 books of the work discuss the ends of the two cities

⁹⁷ Two cities "are mingled together from the beginning to the end of history. One of them, the earthly city, has created for herself such false gods as she wanted, from any source she chose - even creating them out of man - in order to worship them with sacrifices. The other city, the Heavenly City on pilgrimage in this world, does not create false gods. She herself is the creation of the true God, and she herself is to be His true sacrifice. Nevertheless, both cities alike enjoy the good things, or are affected with the adversities of this temporal state, but with a different faith, a different expectation, a different base, until they are separated by the final judgement, and each receives her own end, of which there is no end" (Augustine 2003: 842).

once and for all solving it by tying history completely to the workings of an omniscient divinity, by attaching it to a system which promised perfection, to a God who was wholly absolute in every sense of the word, and with the full implications of this perhaps fully elucidated, for the first time. Augustine wanted to show—and this is the overriding purpose of the *City of God*—that history is planned to the smallest detail, that the omniscience of the divinity necessitates that He knows the course that reality will take and that, for this reason, a beneficent and perfect fate for man is assured (Bourke 1995: 291).⁹⁸ It was this ultimate optimism that gave Augustine a definitive edge over the pessimism of many of his contemporaries, the complete confidence that human life has a purpose and a meaning even if the specifics of this necessarily transcended the comprehension of any one individual mind (Deane 1963: 68).

The Garden of Eden

It was the scattered references to the fall in Jewish literature—the many contradictions and brevity of the story in the Old Testament, and its relative lack of elucidation in Early Christianity—that made it such a fertile and open-ended space for Augustine on which to project his own ideas, to trace the very origins of man's contemporary debasement (Harrison 2007: 19). Looking back to this event would enable Augustine to construct a theory that would comprehensively solve otherness by attributing it solely to man. And every aspect of his mature theology would link together to fully extrapolate the implications both of his admission of failure to find perfection and of his desire to preserve the omnipotence of God. As mentioned one of Augustine's central preoccupations throughout his search for God was that he could not bring himself to see the material world as implicitly evil, believing that this would implicate God's perfection in the world's undeniable imperfection. Consequently, by the time of Rome's fall he had reached the conclusion that God had to have created Adam without sin and in happiness or else He would have created the first man as an immoral or inadequate being, something which he believed was impossible.⁹⁹ To reconcile the omnipotence of God with the material imperfection

⁹⁸ As Mulhull writes, "that clarity and comprehension are our birthright – hence, as structurally perverse or errant and yet redeemable from that fallen state – but as refusing to accept that such redemption is attainable only from a transcendental or divine source... to relocate the source of that redemption within... the world of human experience" (Mulhull 2009: 11).

⁹⁹ "God in his goodness created good things... all things which do not belong to God's own being, though inferior to God, are nevertheless good, and the creation of God's goodness" (Augustine 2003: 455).

of His creation, as brought into stark relief by the Greek philosophical tradition, Augustine would argue most effectively and comprehensively in the *City of God* that Adam and Eve had been originally endowed in the Garden of Eden with the God given ability to allow their minds to correspond to reality as it was (Nash 1969: 35-36; Rist 1994: 263). The natural state of the world as it was initially created, and as could only result from His omnipotence, was good, because it was completely subjected to God's will.

God had created Adam as a special kind of creature, as stated in Genesis, one who was uniquely made in "the image of God." Since this resemblance clearly did not refer to the Christian theologians like Augustine to a physical sense, with their philosophical ideas inspired by the Greeks, as perhaps it did to the Hebrews, this meant that man shared the structure of God's mind.¹⁰⁰ As he writes "these words refer to the inner man, where reason and intellect reside" (Augustine 2010: 76; *Two Books on Genesis, Against the Manichees* 1.17.28). Man's mind enjoyed the distinction, then, of being able alone of God's creations to partake in the intelligibles from which He had constructed the world. Adam had a material body, like the beasts who form a judgement of the world purely based on sensation, but he was also created with a soul that allowed his mind to conform to that of God's (*De Trinitate* 15, 23).¹⁰¹ Adam, via his soul's connection to God, possessed knowledge of the reason for the existence of the rest of God's creation and as such he could name and help maintain the other animals as a sort of caretaker.¹⁰²

In Eden Adam, as he was embodied, could not perceive the universals in themselves without recourse to their material representations as God sees them, but could nevertheless see how each particular partook of the greater universal and how these in turn combined with one another to form reality, because in the Garden Adam was the knowing part of God's creation through his ability to partake in His divine reason. Adam could perceive what the intention was behind each of these respective creations *vis-à-vis* each other in His overall scheme. And in this way, ignorance and error were not the "natural condition of the human race as formed by the

¹⁰⁰ "God made man in his own image, by creating for him a soul of such a kind that because of it he surpassed all living creatures, on earth, in the sea, and in the sky, in virtue of reason and intelligence; for no other creature had a mind like that" (Augustine 2003: 503).

¹⁰¹ "He had bestowed on these intellectual natures the power of free choice, which enabled them, if they so chose, to desert God" (Augustine 2003: 1022).

¹⁰² "God first showed man how much better he was than the cattle and all irrational animals, and this is signified by the statement that all the animals were brought to him that he might see what he would call them" (Augustine 2010: 112; *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees* 2.11.16).

hand of God" (Harrison 2007: 33).¹⁰³ Augustine believed that Adam had he not fallen would in the Garden of God's perfection have lived in harmony with nature and so brought creation to a higher material perfection by spreading the more sophisticated aspects of God's intentions by virtue of his ability to understand the world conceptually (Nash 1969: 41-42).¹⁰⁴ Man in the Garden was like a sort of foreman reading the blueprints of God and directing the other workers accordingly so as to bring everything to a higher unity and purpose as commensurate with God's will.¹⁰⁵ Man, therefore, was not a creature like the others but was put on earth to rule it.¹⁰⁶ And the human ability to use concepts after the fall is a vestige of this original power, because the structure of his mind retains that original image of God's wisdom. It is in this way that concepts after the fall, because they are rooted in the mind of God who created all, continue to seem to correspond to reality while paradoxically never actually touching it (Nash 1969: 59).¹⁰⁷

Before the fall, then, God ruled the soul of man, and so the soul of man ruled his body in a perfect continuum "in an ordered obedience, in faith, in subjection to an everlasting law" just as God rules the material world (Augustine 2003: 870).¹⁰⁸ In the Garden, Adam and Eve "were not distressed by any agitations of the mind, nor pained by any disorders of the body" (Augustine 2003: 567). Augustine believed that man had complete control over every aspect of his body in the Garden, just as man after the fall can still control the movement of his limbs. There was essentially no otherness in the Garden, nothing escaped man's purview "man enjoyed perfect health in the body, entire tranquility in the soul... there was no extreme of heat or of cold... no

¹⁰³ On account of this, some would later argue, and attempt to justify the validity of prophecy by claiming that because Adam was operating as a knowing instrument of the plan in the Garden that he had consequently been exposed to the entire course of future world events, that Adam was shown how everything would operate in tandem with everything else according to God's will, even paradoxically including his own fall.

¹⁰⁴ "This felicity would have continued until, thanks to the blessing pronounced in the words, 'Increase and multiply,' the number of the predestined saints was made up... In this state of bliss there would have been the serene assurance that no one would sin and no one would die" (Augustine 2003: 567).

¹⁰⁵ Adam's unimpeded love for God in the Garden meant that his mind "was blessed by clear light... Adam gave every species of animal its name, and this is an unmistakable sign of wisdom... the first man possessed extensive knowledge and had no need to toil in order to acquire it, he spontaneously avoided error... ignorance and error... have no connection with our nature's original condition; they are both punishments for sin" (Gilson 1967: 149).

¹⁰⁶ "The living creatures from the waters, the flying things, the fishes, and the swimming beasts; of things that walk and creep on earth; and of man himself, excelling all the rest of the creatures on the earth. These are all known by the angels in the word of God, where they have the causes and reasons for their creation, fixed and unchanging; and they are known there in a different fashion than in themselves" (Augustine 2003: 464).

¹⁰⁸ "He created man's nature as a kind of mean between angels and beasts, so that if he submitted to his Creator, as to his true sovereign Lord, and observed His instructions with dutiful obedience, he should pass over into the fellowship of the angels, attaining an immortality of endless felicity, without an intervening death" (Augustine 2003: 502).

desire or fear intervened to hamper his good will. There was no sadness at all, nor any frivolous jollity" (Augustine 2003: 590).¹⁰⁹ As was plain to the first man, God ruled everything in creation and all followed His dictates. Man as a creature under God had only to think about or act upon the physical world and that thing would occur because it was the mind of God that man was relying on to operate in the world, it was God that was really acting, it was the will of God that man was executing in his actions because the connection between the two was seamless. Such a view would also imply that in practicality while Adam still had to maintain his body by eating and breathing, he was initially created as an immortal creature who could prevent himself from aging or dying merely through thought (Augustine 2003: 511).¹¹⁰

Most essentially for understanding Augustine's theology, because as we shall see momentarily this is how he explains the continuation of original sin in Adam's progeny, is that the implications of this view of the pre-fall body necessitated that man had complete control over his sexual functions. Adam and Eve would have conceived children in the Garden, according to this conception, purely through their will orchestrating the actions of their bodies as God had intended, thereby preventing the sexual act from becoming tainted by a submission of the intellect to the baser drives of the animal (Augustine 2003: 583). After the fall, Augustine complains that the coming and going of erections seem to operate as if the penis had a mind of its own and as such sex is the supreme embodiment of the disobedience of the body and the rest of materiality to the mind.¹¹¹ Although this genital organ can be used to great effect in child bearing, it nevertheless "has involuntary movements, which prove either that it could not exist at all in paradise before sin, or if it did exist, that it was not then such as that it should sometimes resist the will" (Augustine 2002: 130; *De Trinitate* 13, 18). Sex, like the rest of the material world, henceforth came to appear as something alien to man, something that stands over him and dominates him against his will.¹¹² As Augustine asks in his Confessions "What is the cause of

¹⁰⁹ Unique physical abilities Augustine argued, such as the ability to twitch one's ears or to contort one's body in extraordinary ways were the residue of this original harmony between the spirit and the body (Augustine 2003: 589).

¹¹⁰ Augustine claims that this immortality is allegorically depicted in Genesis through the depiction of Adam and Eve eating from the Tree of Life (Augustine 2003: 537).

¹¹¹ "The genital organs have become as it were the private property of lust, which has brought them so completely under its sway that they have no power of movement if the passion fails, if it has not arisen spontaneously or in response to a stimulus" (Augustine 2003: 581).

¹¹² And human beings "once given the unflawed glory of creation and the freedom of the will," as Pagels writes, were thrust out of paradise and into a world beyond their control or apprehension one which now came to operate

this monstrous situation?... The mind commands itself and meets resistance... The mind orders the mind to will. The recipient of the order is itself, yet it does not perform it" (Augustine 1992: 147; *Confessions* VIII, 21).

The Fall of Man and the Disobedience of the Will

As discussed Augustine's reconsideration of the worth of the material as a means of protecting God's omnipotence, and so providing a solution to otherness, meant that he needed to show in the *City of God* that the otherness that always accompanies human actions, the adversity and disappointment that overshadow human life, do not come from God or His creation, that they are not inherent within existence itself, but arise from man alone.¹¹³ A sure solution to otherness in a perfect God, then, could only be arrived at by locating the defects in man's soul and experience "to an act of its own rather than to any positive act outside itself" (Barrow 1950: 149). This in turn had to be connected to an omniscient God's claim to total control over every aspect of reality. To explain the existence of error, Augustine had to develop the idea of something within man attributable to man alone which would allow him to take the onus of responsibility for his actions strictly upon himself.¹¹⁴ For Augustine it was the story of the use and abuse of man's will that would provide the real means in the *City of God* for supplying man with an inner connection to God, an explanation of his contemporary misery, and, as we shall see, a path back to Him.

Augustine argued, since the mind of man evidently mirrored the mind of God, was created in the image of God, that man also had a creative will like God. For this reason it was simply within the created nature of the will—since it had to resemble the creative power of an omnipotent God— to will itself, to not be acted upon by things, but to act upon them and so enjoy "perfect autonomy" (Dihle 1982: 126). "For what is so much in the power of the will as the will itself?" (Augustine 2010(2): 21; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.12.26.86). The will, in

autonomously from man in that it did things that he would not have chosen to do and so drove him to act against his own rational will (Pagels 1995: 374).

¹¹³ He had to demonstrate that God "bore no responsibility for the inherent tendency of humans to err" (Harrison 2007: 33).

¹¹⁴ Augustine found all of this, of course, in his discovery of free-will. Augustine would argue that activity directed at fulfilling "what each person elects to pursue and embrace is located in the will, and that the mind is not thrown down from its stronghold of dominance, and from the right order, by anything but the will" (Augustine 2010(2): 29; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.16.34.114).

Augustine's conception, was fundamentally an ability to act irrespective of the circumstances which motivate the action. On pain of an infinite regress Augustine argued that "no cause suggests itself" for an action (Augustine 2003: 478). An action could be determined by nothing prior to itself because this would necessitate that the prior cause had a cause and so on without any conceivable genesis.¹¹⁵ The need for an origin point for action suggested to Augustine that man's freedom had to be a "radical" one, with nothing, even including that of the created nature of human beings, capable of determining it.

As touched on just a moment ago, for Augustine man as a creature was distinctly made so as to be capable of obeying God through wilfully partaking in his mind. If man had no free will, Augustine reasoned, if he could not choose to disobey, if man was simply subject to the sensory immersion of the animal whose instincts simply follow God's will and thereby implicitly fulfill their role in His plan, man would not be able to place a higher value on things for their own sake, he would not be able to express materially the higher concepts of God. For Augustine man alone is a creature capable of loving something other than himself, i.e. not his self-preservation or the fulfillment of the bodily desires. And it is in this way, through free-will, that Augustine believed God provided, as Peter King phrases it, "for the creation of higher order goods" such as altruism, spirituality, piety, and the goodness that comes "through obeying God... without free will, there cannot be any moral goodness" (King 2010: XXII). God created Adam, then, because evidently He judged that this would best enable him to carry out the more complex aspects of His own will, i.e. of His creation, on the material plane.¹¹⁶ Free will, then, was a necessary component of God's plan to bring every element of His own will and mind into existence. In the same way, Augustine maintained that it is free will that allows man to ultimately share in God's nature.¹¹⁷

As discussed extensively by Dihle in *The Theory of the Will in Classical Antiquity* Augustine's development of the idea of an autonomous will as solely responsible for all error and

¹¹⁵ As he writes "The will is the cause of sin, but you are searching for the cause of the will itself. If I were able to find this cause, are you not also going to ask about the cause of this cause that has been found? What will limit our investigation? What will be the end of our discussion and examination?... The root will be that which is its cause! And when you find this one, you are also going to ask about its cause, as I declared, and our investigation will have no limit" (Augustine 2010(2): 107; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.17.48.164; 3.17.48.167).

¹¹⁶ "Someone who possesses and takes delight in the good will... cannot have ill-will towards anyone. Therefore, it follows that he would do injury to no one. This can happen only if he gives each his due" (Augustine 2010(2): 23; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.13.27.93).

¹¹⁷ "Free will, without which no one can live rightly, is a good thing and a divine gift" (Augustine 2010(2): 67; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.18.48.185).

imperfection was motivated by an enormous consideration. Augustine was attempting to reconcile the omniscience of the Hebrew God with the freedom of action, the autonomous activity of human beings, which can alone make these actions worthwhile and important, to thereby provide man with a means of responding to a God who was taken by definition to be above earthly existence. Likewise, and again, Augustine had to save the omniscient perfection of God by attributing evil only to human actions, while, paradoxically, at the same time retaining a connection between man and the divine so as to provide a path for redemption. Augustine had to find a way for men to come to a God for whom, unlike in Greco-Roman philosophy, their reason was no longer thought to be congruous (Dihle 1982: 17).¹¹⁸ If men were felt capable of reaching the divine because their minds were thought to be connected to a God who was now taken to be above the world, as both pagan and Christians alike could agree, then there would have to also be something within man capable of rising above the material world. The sovereign power of God thus mirrored the sovereign will within man's mind, both provided a world transcending power, conducive in the former case to creating and controlling the world and in the latter to explaining the existence of evil, how the world can evidently depart from a God who is necessarily good.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Dihle argues that Augustine developed the "will," the idea of sheer volition, partially because it was the only conceivable means available to allow man to respond to the commandments of a being that was necessarily above his reason, a reason which the failures of the humanist Classical worldview had shown were all too fallible. "Such a notion was overdue by the end of the fourth century" because the attempt to link man's existence to something "imperceptible by its very nature," as we have seen was the running thread of Late Antique thought, was dependant on taking the basis of action beyond man's reason as determined by material circumstances (Dihle 1982: 121).

¹¹⁹ The Greeks because of their ontological preoccupations had no word in their language to correspond to our modern idea of the will as inherited from Augustine because action was thought to arise from knowledge of the world rather than from conformity to some transcendental standard (Dihle 1982: 42). Free will was unthinkable for the ancients, prior to the time of Augustine, because human action could not be envisioned as something separate from the circumstances in which it took place. Augustine came to believe that a reliable understanding of the whole of reality could be gained through placing within man himself a direct connection to the divinity. And by placing the locus within man's actions, once again then, as opposed to the workings of an autonomous awesome, eternal, and intrinsically mysterious natural world, a secure and viable path to the eventual surmounting of non-identity was found. Henceforth it would be this ability to act freely, if misdirected, that was perceived as the cause of error. And this something in man to which human action was thought to correspond could be taken to contain the lone connection to something certain, true, and real. Man had to channel himself toward that abstraction, toward that part of himself linking him to a sort of higher existence above the mundane, relief from his burdens and cares, on the pain of failing to understand himself and thereby of ceasing to be a man. But, this placing of the onus for error on man alone via the will also served to render everything subordinate or superfluous to his exercise of, or connection to, this divine faculty. This was a connection, in an act of total obedience, which allowed for the laborious and ephemeral process dependant on man's activity of ascending to Him, through meditation and spiritual discipline as in Neo-Platonism, to be circumvented. By reaching directly to God the Christian would become one with God merely by obeying Him.

As we have seen Augustine envisioned the will as originally directed to the love of God. Man was not subject to pain in the Garden, he had no disturbing or contradictory thoughts, and his mind was fully at ease and at peace with itself. Adam lived what Augustine took to be the "highest Good" of Greco-Roman philosophy, a situation "where the desires of the flesh do not oppose the spirit, and where there is in us no vice for the Spirit to oppose with its desires" (Augustine 2003: 854). Food was plentiful in the Garden so man had no need to toil to cultivate the soil or to hunt. Man had no need to steal or to commit other kinds of sin to survive, no need to plot or connive to get by because everything was under the direction of God, and God, since He would not have encouraged the corruption of man in any way, this being against His good nature, would not have provided anything but circumstances that were perfectly optimal for man's continuance in this state. Man's body and mind were in perfect harmony because they existed under the aegis of God's will. And so man enjoyed perfect tranquility and happiness and, because he also had no experience of error, had no anxiety about the future but only confidence that his good health would last forever (Gilson 1967: 149).

It is because of the extraordinary nature of Adam and Eve's existence in the Garden that the sin of the eating of the apple was so great. Adam had no motive for sinning beyond simply his own choice to do so. Its motivation was exclusively disobedience to God while latter day sin is a result of living in a sinless world and possessing a sinless nature. Since in the Garden man's desire was not yet corrupted and man did not seek what he could not have, nothing could have been the cause of sin or imperfection other than the will, the human ability to act itself (Gilson 1967: 150). And the ease with which this obedience could have been fulfilled made the sin all the greater, the greatest of sins in fact. "Who can adequately describe the enormity of the evil in a refusal to obey in a matter so easy" (Augustine 2003: 575). In having the capacity to choose whether to obey God or to pursue his own aims, Adam wilfully chose to follow his own path and so his connection to the divinity was severed, and hence man's ability to control the world vicariously on behalf of God was also lost. The order of the universe was turned upside down through the act of original sin, and thus man, ceased "to be fully accessible to himself, just as Adam ceased to be accessible to God" (Brown 2003: 60-61). "With the proud disdain of a tyrant he chose to rejoice over his subjects rather than to be a subject himself; and so he fell from the spiritual paradise" (Augustine 2003: 569). Hence the human will became deformed because, in the tradition of Neo-Platonism, rather than following the higher, God, as the soul was originally

intended, it now looks to the lower, the mutable and sensory, and is controlled by it. The result is that now even against his will man's "mind is often troubled; and his flesh experiences pain, grows old, and dies, and endures all manner of suffering. We should not endure all this against our volition if our natural being were in every way and in every part obedient to our will" (Augustine 2003: 575). Man's body became disobedient to him, his desire at variance to his intellect following the eating of the apple, because by acting according to his own volition, even in committing the seemingly insignificant sin of eating an apple in contravention of God's intentions, Adam, since the act was motivated by his own will and not by that of God's own perfection, committed an act of imperfection. God, in His goodness because He is incapable of being tainted or corrupted, consequently terminated the link between His own will and man's, the link on which man's command of nature relied, not so much as a punishment but by necessity. Again God's absolute perfection and omnipotence means that this cannot have transpired in any other way, in a sense the Deity's hands were tied (MacKinnon 1995: 330).

It is the deformity of the will after the fall—man's ability to choose himself over God—that is the cause of otherness. Man thereafter became immersed in a mass of contradictions by which the mind is nightmarishly "torn apart" (Augustine 1992: 150; *Confessions* VIII, 24).¹²⁰ And because of this, as Augustine writes using a term that we shall see repeated throughout this work, man became "nothing." In trying to become like God, through exercising the will towards its own autonomous purposes, man became a shadowy and mutable figure, living in an unreal world of impermanence and contradiction. "For who can list all the multitude of things that a man wishes to do and cannot" (Augustine 2003: 575). For this reason Augustine calls covetousness, referring to the book of Timothy in the New Testament, the "root of all evils" (Augustine 2002: 93; *De Trinitate* 12, 9).¹²¹

¹²⁰ As Augustine writes of his own inner turmoil "deliver me, O God, from the multitude of words with which I am inwardly afflicted in my soul... For I am not silent in my thoughts, even when I am silent in my words... many are my thoughts, such as You know; they are the thoughts of men, since they are vain" (Augustine 2002: 224; *De Trinitate* 15, 28).

¹²¹ And Adam's sin was passed onto his progeny by virtue of the fact that they are all conceived from a sinful act, an act of concupiscence. That is to say that every human being is a product of the lust which merely serves to perpetuate God's separation, the control of the lower by the higher in the sexual act. Thus the original epistemological corruption which distorted Adam's perception of the world after the Garden is perpetuated to the entire human race through the act of conception (Augustine 2003: 512). The lack of control exhibited by individuals consumed in the sexual act not only symbolized the control of the mind by the body, and so the spiritual by the material, but also the forgetting of God which initiated Adam's sin. And Augustine famously even perceived original sin in the desire of babies for their mother's milk and for this reason maintained that some babies were destined for hell. Concupiscence means that we are all the product of Adam's sin and that, as a result, his primordial

Adam traded the perfect knowledge of everything with which the Creator had endowed him for the half-knowledge that man can come to through the use of his own mind. And in the aftermath of the fall even the nature which man was meant to command now appears to him to be an immense and impenetrable mystery. In place of certainty, in trying to know what he was not intended to know, man has lost the ability to really know anything to the extent that he cannot even understand the consequences of his own actions.¹²² We can also clearly see in this idea that Augustine used Classical culture's ontological focus, the notion that man builds his own world by virtue of his reason, as the embodiment of this fallen state.¹²³ For Augustine it was Adam's original error of thinking that man is responsible for himself, agency or freedom, that was literally the cause of all error.^{124 125}

Evil is thus the use of the world by man in a way that is counter to God's desires. In Augustine's words, "The will sins when it is turned away from the unchangeable and common good, towards its private good, or towards something external, or towards something lower" (Augustine 2010(2): 70; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.19.53.199).¹²⁶ If man uses the things of the world according to his own will, as did Adam, then that which he acts upon becomes

sin is our own (Rist 1994: 126-127). For Augustine, as we shall see, the only "man" not to have been conceived in this way, i.e. through lust, and who consequently avoided original sin, was Jesus Christ.

¹²² Augustine's conception of knowledge, or *scientia*, then does not apply to "whatever can be known by man in human things, where needless canity and harmful curiosity are excessively abundant, but only that whereby the most wholesome faith, which leads to true blessedness, is begotten, nourished, protected, and strengthened" (Augustine 2002: 138; *De Trinitate* 14, 1).

¹²³ Augustine's resistance to the notion of ontology, that man builds his own world of meaning, is clearly of absolute centrality to his theology. This fact is so obvious to me that I am forced to disregard postmodern interpretations of Augustine which have become trendy in recent years but which I believe cherry-pick his work because they very deliberately concentrate on the Confessions while disregarding almost everything else. For them Augustine is all about the failure of the notion of agency that man's fragility his inability to know means that he must place his power completely in a discourse which they equate with God's. As we shall see Augustine's belief in the fragility of man's understanding and in the failures of his agency are just provisional as both will be perfected in the City of God.

¹²⁴ "So anyone thinking highly of himself in his pride is putting his trust in mist; he preens himself for his honors, and fades away with the mist. Pride then is to be curbed, and indeed trampled on with all the deliberation we can muster. And we must understand that we live on this earth only to die, and we must think about the end to which there will be no end. The point is, as I was saying, it's not just a question of you, whoever you are, having grown old and being on top of the world, and thinking you have lived a long time, though you are going to be finished some day; but Adam himself, if he were still alive and going to die, not now but at the end of the world, would not have anything 'long,' because it would have in it something that would be 'last'" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/2, 162; Sermon 33a, 2).

¹²⁵ As Cochrane writes, for Augustine all the problems within Classical culture "originated from a single root... he drew the indictment of Classicism in one comprehensive formula, discovering the source of its difficulties in the fact that it acknowledged the claim of science (knowledge) to be architectonic (self-sufficient and self-originating) and, therefore, entitled to legislate with sovereign authority for the guidance of human life" (Cochrane 1966: 463).

¹²⁶ Or again, "For when the will leaves the higher and turns to the lower it becomes bad not because the thing to which it turns is bad, but because the turning itself is perverse" (Augustine 2003: 477).

divorced from that which gives reality its meaning and existence.¹²⁷ Nothing according to this conception is in itself evil, just as nothing in man's experience was created implicitly to be beyond the control of man's will (Barrow 1950: 149). Evil then is fundamentally a privation. "There is no such entity in nature as 'evil'" (Augustine 2003: 454). Augustine argues that evil's non-existence is akin to silence in the absence of sound; it is a thing which in itself is nothing other than the lack of something else, in this case of God thanks to the wilfulness of man (Augustine 2003: 480).¹²⁸ It arises from man using the world to his own ends rather than to God's.¹²⁹

The important difference here between the views of men like Plotinus and Porphyry and that of Augustine on evil, then, is the lack of agency which the latter assigns to the non-human world. Plotinus wrote that the world, when it mirrored the perfection of the higher realm, was beautiful and good. He likewise saw the potential to turn away from the higher as something pervasive within all of nature, not so for Augustine. As Arendt writes, for Augustine only man, in his exceptionalism, can imitate what is above him. "Man alone of created and changeable things can turn away from its material existence to God and so find its inner nature, through the will" (Arendt 1996: 52). This is the "privileged position" of man, as Augustine puts it, one that uniquely allows him both to stray and adhere to the good and unchangeable (Augustine 2003: 472). If man alone was able to move against the order of things through using the world to his

¹²⁷ Augustine's perspective on action consequently also shifted the emphasis from the object of cognition or knowledge, as in the ontological view, to the way in which the object was approached itself. We see this most clearly in the *Confessions* when he famously describes his pointless theft of pears at a young age. "I became evil for no reason. I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself. My depraved soul leaped from your firmament to ruin. I was seeking not to gain anything by shameful means, but shame for its own sake" (Augustine 1992: 29; *Confessions* II, 9). And so was born, perhaps, the illusion of choice, the idea that there is a part of man that can exist above his experience, above the world itself, one that can freely and autonomously simply choose how an individual will behave in the world.

¹²⁸ Since man and the world are not a part of God's perfect substance, as in the pantheistic view, but are a creation of God, they must also have been created from nothing, as opposed to from God Himself, and so are liable to imperfection. As Augustine writes "it cannot possibly be right for anything which is not of You to be equal to You. Moreover, there was nothing apart from You out of which You could make them (the things of the world)... That is why You made heaven and earth out of nothing... You were, the rest was nothing" (Augustine 1992: 249; *Confessions* XII, 7). The things of the world must have also been created from nothing because Augustine believed, following the Neo-Platonic tradition, that if they had been created from God's substance that this would have rendered God changeable because divisible, and also at the behest of something, and thus no longer immutable. As he writes again "carpenters or any workmen cannot produce anything unless they have something out of which to make it... (but) God did not have to be helped by anything that he had not made... For if something that he had not made helped him to make those thing which he wanted to make, he was not almighty, and that is sacrilegious to believe" (Augustine 2010: 58; *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees* 1.6.10).

¹²⁹ "The city, that is the society, of the ungodly consists of those who live by the standards not of God but of man" (Augustine 2003: 566).

own ends, then he alone also becomes responsible for the otherness in his experience, which again is taken not to be intrinsic but an aberration.

The Really Real

Augustine's position on the Godlike knowledge enjoyed by Adam in the Garden via his connection to the divinity, and which he undermined through the misuse of his will, leads into the issue of his overall epistemology.¹³⁰ Augustine's search, his attempt to solve otherness definitively, led him to believe that God enjoyed an all-encompassing understanding, far superior in its incorporation of both the material and ideal to what was offered by the Neo-Platonists. For Augustine perception seemed to be the prisoner of an ephemeral present, rendering all the information on which human beings base their existence itself, paradoxically, in itself non-existent.¹³¹ Augustine argued, for instance, that the ear is incapable of actually hearing any sound, even of the shortest duration, because every aspect of experience encountered by human beings has a beginning, middle, and end and as such relies on something that an immediate encounter with reality cannot perceive.¹³² This is even truer for concepts, of course, whose consistency is not found in nature and whose existence thereby, in Augustine's mind, necessarily supersedes any kind of immediate perception of reality. For Augustine the ability to remember and so perceive and understand could only be a product of the activity of the "soul," since it

¹³⁰ One must have an understanding of his "theory of knowledge," as developed first in his other two great works the *Confessions* and *De Trinitate*, and through this of its inseparability from his conception of time itself, in order to understand the nature of what he believed was God's omnipresent knowledge of the perfection of our understanding that would occur in His Kingdom through undoing the primordial error of Adam's will in original sin.

¹³¹ "When knowledge is begotten, and that which we have known is placed in the memory and is again seen by recollection, who does not see that the retention in the memory is prior in time to the sight in recollection, as well as to the combining of both of these by the will as a third" (Augustine 2002: 152; *De Trinitate* 14, 10).

¹³² Augustine argued, for instance, that the ear is incapable of actually hearing any sound, even of the shortest duration, because every aspect of reality encountered by human beings has a beginning, middle, and end and as such relies on something which an immediate encounter with reality cannot perceive. Of syllables Augustine writes "the long does not begin to sound unless the short has ceased to sound. I can hardly measure the long during the presence of its sound, as measuring becomes possible only after it has ended. When it is finished, it has gone into the past. What then is it which I measure? Where is the short syllable with which I am making my measurements? Where is the long which I am measuring? Both have sounded; they have flown away; they belong to the past. They now do not exist?... Therefore it is not the syllables which I am measuring, but something in my memory which stays fixed there" (Augustine 1992: 242; *Confessions* XI, 35).

could not be attributed to anything that the body does physically but in contrast could only be attributed to that which exceeds the constraints of a physical body imprisoned in time.^{133 134}

For Augustine the image of God in man was weakened but not wholly destroyed by Adam's fall because humanity still possesses a mind whose structure, perhaps like that of a radio capable of receiving radio waves, can tune in to God's rationality (Harrison 2007: 37).¹³⁵ It is our knowledge of the forms, through our mental connection to an omnipotent God, that allows the world to be apprehended.¹³⁶ Using a Platonic metaphor Augustine argues that God enlightens our corrupted minds like the sun casts its light on the moon and thereby allows it to be seen. Like Plato's supremely perfect and immutable form of the Good, divine illumination shines the light of intelligibility on the world in an analogous way to how the moon seems to emit its own light but in fact merely reflects it from something far greater than itself.¹³⁷ So the human mind can reflect the forms in God's mind, and thus partake in God's perfection, but, as opposed to what Plato maintained, it does not in itself possess these forms in their perfection. Augustine's examination of time drove him to the idea that the human ability to remember, and so base action on the past, could not stem from an aspect of his physical being. Since the past

¹³³ The "sounds of the words are also in the memory even when he does not think of them... since those sounds of the words are also in the memory even when he does not think of them; and the vision of his recollection is formed from them when he thinks of them; and the will of him who remembers and think joins both together" (Augustine 2002: 134; *De Trinitate* 13, 20).

¹³⁴ As Gilson writes, "Augustine discovers in the very act which perceives its existence the presence of another light, the active cause of perception, a light which bears witness to the existence of the first... This second light which watches within is that of the soul itself" (Gilson 1967: 65). The eyes in this respect do not see what is visible, since sense perception via an "inanimate body" cannot account for intelligibility or perception; rather, the mind alone through its connection to the divinity is capable of sight (Augustine 2002: 62; *De Trinitate* 11, 2). The soul, therefore, through exercising its will directs the mind to retain knowledge.¹³⁴ It is the will which applies the memory to reality and so understands it and the will also acts as an interface between sensation and intelligibly allowing both to exist in harmony with one another because it "is adapted both to bodies without and to their images within" (Augustine 2002:70; *De Trinitate* 11, 5).¹³⁴

¹³⁵ The soul in this capacity is the intermediary between the eternal ideas and the body whose material existence renders it unable to partake in them (Nash 1969: 67). But, the omnipotence of Augustine's God necessitated that the soul is not of God's perfect substance but is instead, like the material world, created from nothing and so capable of error (Augustine 2003: 477). And this raised the problem, not confronted before Augustine, of trying to understand how the soul of man can partake in the divine and eternal forms if it itself is degraded or imperfect. Augustine's solution to this is to argue that the divine ideas are not in the mind itself but instead that the structure of the human mind, because man was created in the image of God, enables us to partake in His intelligibility through what he calls "divine illumination."

¹³⁶ "With the eye of the mind... we perceive in that eternal truth, from which all temporal things have been made... The true knowledge of things, thence conceived, we bear with us as a word, and beget by speaking from within" (Augustine 2002: 34; *De Trinitate* 9, 7).

¹³⁷ And from this man "derives every mode of being, every species, every order, all measure, number, and weight. He is the source of all that exists in nature, whatever its kind, whatsoever its value, and of the seeds of forms, and the forms of seeds, and the motions of seeds and forms" (Augustine 2003: 196).

was by definition beyond physicality, Augustine dismisses the idea that anything physical in the brain and so confined to the present, as the Platonist took for granted, could be responsible for memory. The ability to remember and so understand, for Augustine then, had to owe to man's connection to something beyond time, to the mind's ability, as we have seen, to reflect God's understanding. But, the essential thing to understand here is that Augustine's preoccupation with the mystery of time's ephemeral nature when juxtaposed with the need of our concepts and even sensations to partake in a consistency that seemingly exceeds our perception of reality, as it is dependent on the vicissitudes of time and so God's presumed eternal nature, led him to conclude that becoming, the material flux that always confront our experience, was an illusion.^{138 139} The reality of things instead could only be drawn from the connection of man's mind to God above, we do not in fact remember the past at all when we conceptualize the world; instead we participate, via the mind, on a moment to moment basis, in God's actual being.^{140 141} Our inability to understand how God, and by extension reality, operates in time, therefore, comes from the difficulty we have in imagining him "by His own standard" (Augustine 2003: 495).¹⁴²

For Augustine then, as Nash writes, we recall forms, in contrast to Plato, not through "our remembering of the past. It is on the contrary, a remembering of the present" (Nash 1969: 83). Again this is because man has no capacity to "remember" in the absence of God. Rather man's perception and concepts, as perhaps he can uniquely realize, depend on his ability to partake in "the intellectual, non-physical heaven where the intelligence's knowing is a matter of simultaneity – not in part, not in an enigma, not through a mirror, but complete, in total openness" (Augustine 1992: 253; *Confessions* XII, 16). And it follows from this, that if, as

¹³⁸ As Augustine writes in his *Confessions* "what does not exist, certainly cannot be the subject of information... neither future nor past exists, and it is inexact language to speak of three times – past, present, and future... They pass away, and how I do not know. And we repeatedly speak of time and time, of times and times... We speak in this way, and hear people saying this, and we are understood and understand. Their usages are utterly commonplace and everyday. Yet they are deeply obscure" (Augustine 1992: 235 and 237; *Confessions* XI, 26 and XI, 28).

¹³⁹ For "God does not see things according to the measure of time, nor is anything new wrought in His vision and knowledge when anything temporal and transitory takes place" (Augustine 2002: 90; *De Trinitate* 12, 7)... "past and future things are all present together with present things" (Augustine 2002: 180; *De Trinitate* 15, 7).

¹⁴⁰ Augustine could not conceive of how an omniscient God could be bound by time, for this would render him liable to be acted upon by material events.

¹⁴¹ "A being who does not know all the future is certainly not God" (Augustine 2003: 194).

¹⁴² This is to maintain that everything in other words, even materiality, was subject to a permanent state of being and as such was not implicitly unknowable but had a fixed and permanent nature, in the mind of God Himself, one that man could reflect albeit imperfectly through the divine illumination of his mind. There would be no changeable goods "unless there were an unchangeable good.... (if) you could put these goods aside and perceive the good in itself, you would see God" (Augustine 2002: 9; *De Trinitate* 8, 3).

opposed to the idea of an eternal and ever-changing world, time were taken to be an illusion, if the material world as it was actually created by God is fixed and unchanging, then the objects that we perceive as varied representations of the same things, must in truth be nothing other than aspects, rather than as with Plato multiple emanations or copies, of the same thing, of the perfect "forms" or ideas of God.¹⁴³ While for Plato abstraction ultimately did not exist because the material itself had no existence, when compared to the eternal forms, for Augustine abstraction does not exist because the physical is taken up into the spiritual; they are one in the same, and as such the material world is not ultimately unknowable, rather quite the opposite must be the case, one only has to grasp the essence or nature of everything, in Augustine's case via obedience to the Deity, to gain a perfect knowledge of the mundane (Nash 1969: 91). As he writes, such knowledge would not be "of one thing at one moment and of another thing at another moment, but is concurrent without any temporal successiveness" (Augustine 1992: 253; *Confessions* XII, 15). Immutability, an unchanging and fixed perfection, is thus the true state of reality, a fixed and unalterable state of affairs and a knowledge of the world applying to all times and circumstances.

Augustine's epistemology, then, as I have been leading up to in the preceding pages, implies the promise of possessing certain knowledge of the entirety of existence via the self alone through belief in its source, i.e. God (Harrison 2007: 40). This is the goal for man, the ultimate consequence of history to which it is leading and against which human activity bears no comparison, the promise of the end of otherness with total reconciliation to every aspect of existence. Augustine maintained that the implications of intelligibility when fully extrapolated suggest that God has willed everything into existence at once and as such that all ultimately exist in a moment of simultaneity.¹⁴⁴ Man's knowledge like God's ultimately "admits no transient element" (Augustine 1992: 255; *Confessions* XII, 18). According to Augustine, man does not simply have a connection to some supernatural entity above existence as in Neo-Platonism rather his link to the Deity is brought down to Earth and made one with it. His soul thereby is not

¹⁴³ As Augustine writes "it is not that God's knowledge varies in any way... It is not with God as it is with us... He sees in some other manner, utterly remote from anything we experience or could imagine... he does not see things by turning his attention from one thing to another. He sees all without any kind of change" (Augustine 2003: 452).

¹⁴⁴ And so God's "nature will never vary at different times, and his will is not external to his nature. It follows that he does not will one thing at one time, and another thing at another time. Once and for all and simultaneously, he wills everything that he wills. He does not need to renew his resolutions. He does not want this now and that then, nor does he later come to will what formerly he did not will, or reject what previously he wished. For such a will is mutable, and nothing mutable is eternal" (Augustine 1992: 254; *Confessions* XII, 18).

something mysterious but simply a part of his natural state of being (Nash 108). And for this reason, while Plotinus could meet the One only in ecstasy, with ordinary experience by implication being lesser or base, Augustine's experience of God is to see him as pervasive, as underlying every aspect of reality.¹⁴⁵ This is why Adam knew no evil or error in the Garden, because being linked to God's mind he could see particulars as manifestations of the forms themselves, and so reality for what it really is even if his corporeality prevented him from seeing the forms—the ideas in God's mind—in their true perfection. Once man severed his connection to the divine will of God, the natural world below man could not continue to obey his soul, for his ability to control it only came from his connection to the divine, through acting as its instrument. Henceforth man's experience on Earth became "full of this vast mass of evils" (Augustine 2003: 863). He could no longer even control his body by virtue of his will because he was now reliant on his own reason, on the pale imitation of God's mind which is his own and which lacks real reality when it is severed from the will of God. After this Adam, and his descendants, lost the ability to choose to sin or not to sin because that first sin determined everything that would follow from it; it necessitated further sinning. Since Adam broke the link, and his will became deformed thereafter, he could not will himself back to God, because doing so would be the act of a will no longer operating on behalf of God, but according to its own confused ends (MacIntyre 1988: 157).¹⁴⁶ And as such man is now a sort of fractured creature with a mind that retains the intelligibility of the world through partaking in the divine intelligence but who, at the same time, possesses a body that dominates him just like the other animals are seemingly driven by the demands of their bodies through submission to the instincts that God has implanted in them.

Augustine advocates for a sort of material Platonism in that physical reality is not taken to be merely a divine emanation, a sort of haphazard explosion of multiplicity and particularity from a more perfect form, but rather is seen to have a fixed objective structure accessed through

¹⁴⁵ As Cochrane writes, Augustine's connection to God is "emphatically not ecstatic and it presupposes no such detachment from the material world... In this light... man no longer sees himself over against a 'nature'... on the contrary, he sees himself and his universe together as... a 'creature,' whose origin, nature, and destiny are determined by the will of God" (Cochrane 1966: 481).

¹⁴⁶ And after the fall Adam lost his immortality and became bound to his body and subordinate to the material. As God said to man immediately after the Fall in the Book of Genesis "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

the soul via the unchanging eternal ideas themselves. Man's thought depends on knowledge that "cannot be uttered in sound nor thought in the likeness of sound... it precedes all the signs by which it is signified, and is begotten by the knowledge which remains in the mind when this same knowledge is spoken inwardly" (Augustine 2002: 188; *De Trinitate* 15, 11). This is also to claim that the intelligibility of the material world, and even of our sensory experience of it, owes not to the world itself but to man, to his ongoing connection to the divinity, to man's internal ability to partake in these forms through the structure of his mind. Sensation and perception belong to the soul because material things in themselves do not possess their own existence since our experience of them is transitory. They only have duration over time, and as such reality, because of their existence in the soul of man himself, i.e. because man perceives them. Contrast this with the Platonic conception of intelligibility that would depict man as only loosely knowing the material world through reference to shadowy forms that somehow remain within the soul even while embodied. As Harrison writes, this would necessitate that "the proper object of the intellect cannot be the essences of material things, for God is not to be found there. Rather the intellect was originally designed for knowledge of the entire realm of being" (Harrison 2007: 48). And since Augustine argues that the truth of things exist by virtue of their ability to exemplify, rather than copy, what already exists in God's mind, the consequence of this is that there is no room for a otherness beyond man, for, as Nash suggests, "any unknowable *ding an sich*" (Nash 1969: 77). In other words, for Augustine, the world is literally brought into being and exists, in a very real sense, in man himself by virtue of his understanding. To locate anything as ultimately beyond man consequently would render reality implicitly unreal, as not even perceivable moreover, since it would run against Augustine's entire theory of mind.^{147 148}

The notion that everything in the world possesses an inner being known to God also raises the intriguing idea that God does not have to experience things materially to actually perceive them. This will become important in Augustine's depiction of the final understanding

¹⁴⁷ Whereas for Plotinus, then, authentic reality lay beyond man's rational comprehension, Augustine asks how thought is possible at all, rather than presuming that man uses his reason to impose an image on the world derived from a higher state of being (Cochrane 1966: 474).

¹⁴⁸ And Augustine does this with the aim of trying to ground man's experience in a more certain and reliable basis. This constitutes Augustine's "revolt" from the norms of his time, against the classical divide between an autonomous human agency linked to reason and a chaotic natural world "which rendered man a stranger in his own household" (Cochrane 1966 454).

of reality possessed by the inhabitant of the City of God as we shall see later on.¹⁴⁹ God knows what things are and where they are headed. The world is not in chaos or unknowable to Him; there can be neither becoming nor any antinomy between the Creator's conception of reality and His creation. In the Classical conception of finding happiness in the present, as in Stoicism for instance, "the pure pleasure of existence" was the ideal because human misery results from the soul's attachment to past and future cares (Hadot 2004: 195). There is no use worrying about that which is beyond our control and this is indeed the root of all human suffering. In contrast in Augustine's view of time, the soul, and the security and happiness that it can find, resides precisely in its ability to transcend the present through memory and obedience as commensurate with the dictates of one's own inner being. It is only in the certain knowledge as offered by an omniscient Deity that exceeds time, and therefore is permanent and unassailable and thus cannot be taken away, that happiness is to be found.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the soul in this conception is not merely an abstract entity to be discarded through union with the One, as it was for the Platonists, but something intensely personal, and the locus and cause of the human struggle for truth and meaning.^{151 152}

¹⁴⁹ As Gilson writes again, "To see things in God's ideas would be to know them without having to see them. God knows all things, even material things, *a priori* because they are merely copies of His ideas. Thus if we had full knowledge of God's ideas, we should know material things without having to perceive these things themselves" (Gilson 1967: 82).

¹⁵⁰ Augustine's epistemology then is fundamentally psychological and the product of an internal process within the individual rather than of any interaction with the external world. It is through the soul alone, as he writes, that "all other things are likewise known" (Augustine 2002: 14; *De Trinitate* 8, 6). It turns away from the world and toward itself to understand not how the self is relating to the external world, but instead what is going on inside the self that allows it to perceive the world at all. This was a drastic change from the Greco-Roman conception of the self and must be seen in the context of Augustine's whole theology, as Dihle argues, "in the wider context of the change from the ontological to a psychological approach to religion and ethics which he initiated" (Dihle 1982: 132). It must be taken in tandem with Augustine's placing of the onus on man for error and the equation of his natural state with a prelapsarian perfection.

¹⁵¹ As Augustine writes of the Platonists books "those pages do not contain the face of this devotion, tears of confession, your sacrifice, a troubled spirit, a contrite and humbled spirit" (Augustine 1992: 131; *Confessions* VII, 27).

¹⁵² In Augustine's theory of knowledge there is also no need for a semi-divine demiurgic Nous, as in Platonism. The Neo-Platonists, as Augustine argues, have a "right conception of God" in his omniscience but it is the "divine illumination" from God that allows the world to be comprehended, not the Nous, the active creator of multiplicity, who is at the origin of the forms (Augustine 2003: 434). Creation and ultimate being are thereby rolled into one. And in this respect the Christian God, since he created existence no longer resembled the creative "Nous" of the pagan philosophers or the One who is the basis of being. Rather the Christian God now became both thereby uniting creation and eternity with mutability, form and content, the microcosm and the macrocosm. As Augustine writes in the *City of God* "we have nothing to do, in this work, with those who hold that the divine mind does not create, and has no interest in the world... For it is out of the question to hold and assert that any creature... has any other creator than God" (Augustine 2003: 504). And thus rather than a set of mutually exclusive and intangible transcendent concepts, God, as the creator of both the ideal and material, now became almost like a particular, in the sense of how the pagan philosophers would have viewed him, in a world of particulars. And as such existence and

Predestination and the Man of Faith

For Augustine man needs faith to find this salvation, the same faith that enables and underpins all of human knowledge. Knowledge is a struggle within the self and is a product of the self turning to the higher from the lower, to the recognition of the true basis of that which enables one to know. This turning to what is above him—the divine, that which he cannot understand but only obey—is clearly an act of faith and submission through the will, as has been discussed above.¹⁵³ Faith is the only basis of understanding, for Augustine whether we realize it or not, and so when people deny this through scepticism or turn excessively to material things, when they deny God, they are subverting the basis of their own intellect. For Augustine, as discussed, only a creature capable of reasoning—one who can use concepts by partaking in God's intelligibility—can exercise a will as God does and so actively choose to believe, rather than simply exist in drives and instincts as is the case with the other animals (Nash 1969: 29-30). Faith then is an awakening of the rational mind to its own need to believe, its own basis in something more permanent and certain than itself, and it must rely on the only sure basis for truth on the material plane, that which has been revealed or instituted by God, meaning Holy Scripture and the Church.¹⁵⁴

As we just saw, God's ability to exist outside of our sense of time, to see everything at once, was an essential component of Augustine's theory of mind, perception, and intelligibility.¹⁵⁵ Important for understanding Augustine's theology of reconciliation with

its course was His ultimate choice and up to His direction, because He was now not just a self-contained concept, but like a particular could create things other than Himself, the rest of existence from Himself, and as such intelligibility was no longer remote and divorced from reality as was necessarily the case for Plato's forms. And for the same reason the idea of a linear plan or a divine purpose known to the Deity, a true theory of history, first becomes tenable. It was from the Neo-Platonists that Augustine had appropriated the characteristics of divinity.

¹⁵³ As reviewed Augustine came to realize that faith, meaning the will's obedient love for something other than itself, was indispensable in every area of human life and that even the dependence of our concepts and sensations on memory, i.e. on an unknowable past, means that our cognition is an act of belief and so of faith. "We must believe before we understand, and be on our guard that our faith may not be feigned" (Augustine 2002: 12; *De Trinitate* 8, 5).

¹⁵⁴ "We have heard by an example who the meek are; let's try and define them in words, if we can. The meek are those who, in all their good deeds, in everything they do well, only find pleasure in God, and who, in all the evil things they suffer, don't get annoyed with God. Come on then, brothers and sisters, pay attention to this rule, this standard; let's stretch ourselves to measure up to it, let's look for growth, in order to fulfill it... So whatever good you do, be pleased only with God about it; whatever evil you suffer, don't be displeased with God about it. What else? *Do this, and you shall live* (Lk 10:28). Evil days won't swallow you up, you will escape the menace of the words, *Woe to the world because of scandals* (Mt 18:7)." (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/3, 361; Sermon 81, 3).

¹⁵⁵ "A being who does not know all the future is certainly not God" (Augustine 2003: 194).

otherness, is his argument that God's existence outside of time, his understanding of the full implications of every action before it occurs, meant that he could order events to bring about greater goods. These events included acts of our own free will which are responsible for evil. Man's will was free to choose but this did not stop God from knowing what we will choose before it happens, or at least seems to have from the human perspective, and so using our sins in ultimately beneficial ways, nor did this perspective implicate God in the evil that men do since the choice is still always our own.¹⁵⁶

Man is free to choose his actions, even if they are ultimately arranged by a higher power to bring about a greater purpose. Man is still free, the choice still depends on man, God merely knows what the choice will be before it has been made and plans accordingly.¹⁵⁷ And for the same reason prayers are necessary, even though the course of events is pre-determined, because "to him there is no difference between seeing us about to pray and listening to our prayers" (Augustine 2003: 390). God knows that we will pray and plans accordingly. He arranged the course of events, as we shall see momentarily, to test man's faith, to test how he would react to the perils which confront him, and thereby to purify man through the exercise of a love whose selflessness was akin to that of God's and so to make him eligible to be taken into God's very substance. It is God's divine grace, which orders the world, a grace whose ultimate purpose is man's redemption at the end of time. God orders our choices rather than makes them; he has distributed temporal goods and strife according to his plan for the world; good and bad befall all men alike. God arranges events "not at random or, as one may say, fortuitously, because he is God, not fortune. Rather he gives in accordance with the order or events in history, an order completely hidden from us, but perfectly known to God himself. Yet God is not bound in subjection to this order of events; he is himself in control, as the master of events, and arranges the order of things as governor" (Augustine 2003: 176-177).

The novelty of Augustine's solution to the problem of determinism and agency may seem self-evident for a religion that has a Deity among whose attributes include omniscience, yet

¹⁵⁶ "We assert both that God knows all things before they happen and that we do by our free will everything that we feel and know would not happen without our volition... if there is for God a fixed order of all causes, it does not follow that nothing depends on our free choice" (Augustine 2003: 191-192).

¹⁵⁷ "Although He has foreknowledge of our will, it is the will of which He has foreknowledge. Therefore, it is going to be our will, since He has foreknowledge of our will. Nor could it be our will if it were not in our power. Therefore, He has foreknowledge of our power. Hence power is not taken away from me due to His foreknowledge – it is thus mine all the more certainly, since He whose foreknowledge does not err foreknew that it would be mine" (Augustine 2010(2): 79; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.3.8.34-3.3.8.35).

nothing could be further from the case.¹⁵⁸ This position was able to retain or protect omnipotence and at the same time to absolve God from evil while yet explaining it.¹⁵⁹ But, this raised the all important problem of God's motive for creating man, given that He would, from Augustine's perspective, have undoubtedly known that Adam would fall (Rist 1994: 294). And an adequate understanding of this question is of pre-eminent importance in untangling Augustine's entire view of God's grace and man's destiny and his ultimate message and theology of history in the *City of God*.

God, for Augustine, always brings good out of evil as is commensurate with his perfect and immutable nature. He only allows evil to exist, since he knows of its existence prior to its actual creation, if it can advance the cause of good. Consequently, prior to His creation of Adam, Augustine argued that God must have had full and instantaneous knowledge of his fall and its negative implications "He was not ignorant of what He was going to create, yet God nevertheless decided to proceed with the creation of man. He created, therefore, because He knew" (Augustine 2002: 194; *De Trinitate* 15, 13). For Augustine, and this is the crux of his solution to otherness, God's creation of Adam could only mean that it was done with a larger purpose in mind. He reasons that since God saw the evil, or otherness, which would arise from man's creation that He would not have proceeded with it unless His ultimate plan was to make man better than he was, if his fall in other words was necessary for elevating him to an even higher or better state than that in which he was originally created in the Garden of Eden.¹⁶⁰ This higher state, as we shall turn to momentarily, would not be a periodic communing with the Deity or with all reality through the self, as promised in animism, or a connection to something superhuman and mysterious, as with polytheistic belief systems, but the depiction of the expected end-point of humanity as being an achieved union for all time with the basis of all reality.

¹⁵⁸ As Peter King suggests, "Augustine regarded his reconciliation of human free will and divine grace as one of his crowing achievements. The subsequent history of theories of free will and moral responsibility and the extremely acrimonious history of theological discussions of grace, have confirmed the accuracy of this statement" (King 2010: XXXI).

¹⁵⁹ "We are in no way compelled either to preserve God's pre-eminence by abolishing our free will or to safeguard our free will by denying (blasphemously) the divine foreknowledge... let us never dream of denying his foreknowledge in the interests of our freedom; for it is with his help that we are, or shall be, free" (Augustine 2003: 195).

¹⁶⁰ Again, there was no possible alternative to this conception of man's destiny, given Augustine's assumptions about the evil in the world and the good nature of God. As Augustine writes God "never would have created a man, let alone an angel, in the foreknowledge of his future evil state, if He had not known at the same time how He would put such creatures to good use, and thus enrich the course of world history" (Augustine 2003: 449).

But, the question arises at this point, when the subject of Augustine's belief in man's ultimate destiny is raised, of why God, if He is all powerful, could not simply have created Adam as a part of Himself in the first place, as is commensurate with what the scriptures and Christ have promised to men of faith in the future. As we saw, Augustine argues that when Adam chose the material over the spiritual, when he directed his will to the world and away from God, he became immersed in the world of the material because his link to the deity was broken. Adam became bestial and a slave to the material world because he chose the love of the world and his own love of self over a love for God. But, by the same token it is possible for those who love God, Augustine believed, a love demonstrated by their unyielding faith and obedience, to become a part of Him. This is a selfless and unmotivated obedience, a love for love's sake, an ability to love something other than the self. Essentially, this is akin to the love that Augustine argued makes up God's nature, the selfless love that an omniscient being needing nothing would necessarily have for His own creation. In this respect it is a love that moves all creation. And it is only in man's ability to imitate this love, through choosing obedience, a love and faith in God, over the love of self, that Adam's error of will can be undone.

The higher virtues in God's plan and mind, such as altruism and obedience, are only possible, as discussed, for a being that is capable of freely choosing their actions. Clearly obedience would not be possible if the possibility did not also exist of disobedience, nor could there be any choice to help another without motivation other than for the goodness of the action itself, for the love of the other for no reason other than love itself, if man were simply a product of his drives and instincts. The Godlike elements in man's nature, then, depend on man's ability to actually "choose" between the material and the spiritual. Therefore before God was capable of bringing into existence a wholly spiritual creature, a God-man like Himself, one composed of the higher spiritual qualities akin to God and His love, one who did not live immersed in the material but rather was capable of controlling it through his will and seeing it simultaneously as it is, just as God does, He had to first create a creature capable of turning away from the spiritual through also being material. It would only be in this way that the spiritual love of God could fully express itself through the acts of an obedient will, by virtue of being surrounded by evil in other words, that the Godlike man of faith could have a chance to show himself. This is because perfected man cannot simply be created. In other words, since his resemblance to the divine depends on something emergent, i.e. the ability to will obedience, his existence depends on a set

of factors, the world of corruption or otherness, that provide him with an opportunity to demonstrate his faith.

Man's redemption, then, depends on his immersion in a world where the orientation to the material was the norm, rather than one where obedience to God's will was his created and natural state as was the case with Adam in the Garden.¹⁶¹ It is only in a world where everything is pointing away from God that the soul of the individual can truly be tested. Salvation is only possible when the soul can point alone and without any motivation to God, when the wheat can be separated from the chaff so to speak, when those who are capable of loving God as He loves them, without motivation or reward, with a selfless and altruistic obedience, can be revealed and so taken into God's nature by demonstrating through a lifetime of the exercise of an obedient will that one has a soul that is capable of doing so. As Elaine Pagels rightly puts it quoting Augustine, "God allows us to sin in order to prove to us from our own experience that 'our true good is free slavery'" (Pagels 1995: 392). The path to God taken by the soul then must be hard and against one's actual experience of this degraded life; it cannot be easy. God of course knows, as we just saw, who will demonstrate this obedience even before they appear to do so, and in this sense the inhabitants of the City of God at the end of time are a pre-destined elect, but the "choice" to obey nonetheless belongs to man, and the souls of men could not work themselves into their spiritual state without undergoing the experience of a life surrounded by the evils of the world after the fall. Such a man at the end of time will be capable through his purity of will, owing to his untainted and completely selfless soul, of full spiritual transformation into the divine nature itself.

Thus there was no better way for Augustine to conceive of for God to go about purifying man, to enable him to come to the spiritual, for his will to uniquely give expression to the spiritual through having the capacity for obedience, than by having created him originally as a

¹⁶¹ "That, you see, is the reason why God mixes some bitter pills into earthly good fortune, to make us seek another sort of good fortune, whose sweet taste is not deceptive. And even these bitter pills the world tries to use, in order to turn you away from your aiming at what lies ahead, and turn you backward again. It's about these very pills of bitterness, these very afflictions that you grumble and say, "Look how everything is going to wrack and ruin in these Christian times." Why all the fuss? God didn't promise me this, that these things won't perish, this isn't what Christ promised me. The eternal one promised eternal things; if I believe, from being mortal I shall become eternal. Why all the fuss, O unclean, worn out world? Why all the fuss? Why are you trying to turn me away from my aim? Though you are passing away, you want to hold on to me; what would you do if you really stayed forever?... Let the world prosper, let the world be turned upside down; *I will bless the Lord* who made the world; come what may, I will bless him. Whether things go well materially, whether they go badly materially, *I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise always in my mouth*" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/4, 93; Sermon 105, 8).

combination of the material and the spiritual, the will and the other properties of the soul fused together with the bodily into one being who would be immersed in a world of sin.¹⁶² This is why he writes that those destined for the City of God do not simply do different things than those who are not to be saved but rather confront life "with a different faith, a different expectation, a different love" (Augustine 2003: 842). A being who through a lifetime of choice within the context of a world where everything points to the opposite of that spirituality, to mortality and evil, can thereby demonstrate obedience and devotion, a love for love's sake, a faith in God, that would enable the soul of that person to be incorporated into God's perfection. As Augustine writes in an important passage, the mind linked as it is to the body is in itself "too weak to cleave to that changeless light and to enjoy it; it is too weak even to endure the light... And so the mind had to be trained and purified by faith" (Augustine 2003: 430).

This then is the message of the *City of God*; the identification of will with love and love with obedience and the path to perfection in God is "Augustine's powerful and transforming thesis" (Rist 1994: 188).¹⁶³ It is Augustine's explanation for the suffering, the otherness in his experience, that befalls man. Life, history, is a test of a selfless faith. It is a wandering within the earthly city created by Adam's original sin. It is a making up for the disobedience of Adam

¹⁶² One of Augustine's favourite examples of this is his image of the world as an olive press. "All around us God is frightening people, because he doesn't want to find anything to condemn. Something is always going on in this olive press. The world is the press, there is no end to its pressures. Be oil, not dregs. Let each of you be converted to God and change your manner of life. The oil goes by hidden channels to its own secluded vats. Others sneer, mock, blaspheme, make loud accusations in the streets: the dregs are oozing out. Yet the Lord of the press does not cease from operating it through his workmen, the holy angels. He knows his oil, he knows how much it can take, the exact pressure needed to squeeze it out. *The Lord knows, you see, who are his own* (2 Tm 2:19). Avoid the dregs. They are murky, out in the open for all to see. *The Lord knows who are his own*. Be the oil, avoid the dregs" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/1, 385; Sermon 19, 6). Or again, "The world now is just like an oil press; it's under pressure. If you're dregs, you run off down the drain; if oil, you remain in the vat. One way or the other, pressure there has to be. Observe the dregs, observe the oil. Sometimes pressure is applied in the world; for example, famine, war, want, dearth, poverty, an epidemic, robbery, greed; pressure on the poor brings unrest to the cities—we see it all happening. That these things would happen was foretold, and we see them happening. Amid these tribulations we find people grumbling and saying, "Look what great evils there are in these Christian times! How good things were, and plenty of them, before this age of Christianity! Things weren't nearly so appalling then." That's the dregs coming out under pressure, running down the drain; its mouth is black, because it is blaspheming; it doesn't shine. The oil gleams. And you find other people emerging from the same pressure, and the same threshing that threshed those others. Isn't it the very same threshing that threshed them? You have heard the voice of the dregs, now hear the voice of the oil: "Thanks be to God! Blessed be your name. All these evils with which you are battering us had been foretold; we are assured that the good things too are going to come. When we and the wicked are chastised together, your will is done. We know you as a Father when you make promises, we know you as a Father when you wield the rod; train us well, and give us the inheritance which you have promised at the end. We bless your holy name, because you have never been a liar, you have brought about everything just as you have foretold it" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/4, 180-181; Sermon 113a, 11).

¹⁶³ "Free will was given first, with the ability not to sin; and the last gift was the inability to sin. The first freedom was designed for acquiring merit; the last was concerned with the reception of a reward" (Augustine 2003: 1089).

which will allow man to one day surpass Adam and come to God by becoming capable of gaining His perfection. And it is important when we see life in this way, when we realize that the errors of this world are not irredeemable but necessary and part of a higher and ultimately reconcilable purpose, that we draw the correct implications about how to approach life and how to confront all that in life which befalls and surrounds us which appears to exceed our understanding and control. When men come to see that they have themselves caused error by departing from or not recognising their natural state, on the one hand, and, on the other, when they see these errors as part of a necessary scheme, the triumph of a historical inevitability, to allow them to become even greater than they were, when everything in history becomes implicated in this ultimate and inevitable redemption, then the means of achieving the deliverance that was so lacking or so intangible and esoteric in the Classical worldview becomes possible.¹⁶⁴ Again, this is something to which man must conform at the risk of losing himself, of ceasing to be a man at all, a conformity that seemingly offers the promise of everything, but which comes at the price of arresting his capacity to give the world a respect and an autonomy from himself.

The Nature of Obedience

The pious man is one who endeavours to use the universe and himself strictly in light of the God who alone possesses reality. Deliverance above all involves man's submission to God's superiority and a fearless acceptance of all that God should feel fit to throw at him over the course of his life.¹⁶⁵ Man must remember that life is a test of obedience, of one's fitness for God. Man must "walk by faith, not by sight" (Augustine 2003: 873). Man "must not, in the rashness of human folly... find fault, in any particular, with the work of that great Artificer who created all things" (Augustine 2003: 475).¹⁶⁶ It is only "the grace of Christ our Saviour" that can bring us

¹⁶⁴ Augustine does not view as would become a problem in the Middle Ages, as we shall see, predestination as a handicap on God's omnipotence. As he writes, God arranges events "not at random or, as one may say, fortuitously, because He is God, not fortune. Rather He gives in accordance with the order or events in history, an order completely hidden from us, but perfectly known to God Himself. Yet God is not bound in subjection to this order of events; He is Himself in control, as the master of events, and arranges the order of things as governor" (Augustine 2003: 176-177).

¹⁶⁵ "Divine providence thus moves us not to indulge in silly complaints about the state of affairs, but to take pains to inquire what useful purposes are served by things" (Augustine 2003: 453).

¹⁶⁶ "So then, brothers, be upright of heart; that is, do not get annoyed with God for any reason at all... let the Lord our God go on mixing bitter flavors into this world, let Him mix them in by all means... He knows what to do. Let's

liberation from this "hell on earth" (Augustine 2003: 1068). The City of God and God Himself is the endpoint of humanity for Augustine, and because of this a theology of history and a philosophy of history, in his mind, were clearly synonymous and implicit in each other (Gilson 1967: 184).^{167 168}

Obedience, then, is the mark of the pious man who has a chance of living for eternity in the City of God, one who can make up for Adam's sin by studying Scripture and living by its revealed truths, by taking baptism and receiving the Eucharist in the Church that God founded. Salvation, a life free from error, comes at the price of total subordination to the dictates of a system. That is to say that the point of existence is the elimination of those that "glory in themselves instead of in God" who suppose that the world "is gained by themselves instead of given by God" (Augustine 2003: 718). Obedience here, in commonality with the succeeding figures, is the human orientation or way of being which is taken as alone possessing reality. It offers the promise of authenticity by aligning man to his intended nature. Since the root of the sin and error that stand between man and God is pride, it is only a fulsome humility that can provide man with salvation. This is a humility which, ironically becomes the greatest and most important thing in creation (Barrow 1950: 149). Our goodness and happiness as human beings depend on acknowledging our inferiority to God. This is the test that God has put before us, of

leave Him to it. Let's just hand ourselves over to be cured, let's not give the doctor advice" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/1, 340; Sermon 15a, 9).

¹⁶⁷ Man is more worthy of life than the other creatures, then, not only because his intelligence makes him closer to that which supremely is life, God, and not only because through his will man alone possesses dynamism, but also because his activity, along with that of God, is alone responsible for bringing about the course of events that take place in reality. Man as opposed to the other animals "at once exists and lives and understands... Do you think you can find anything in us, that is, find anything among the features that complete our nature as human beings, that is more excellent than understanding?" (Augustine 2010(2): 42; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.6.13.52). A hierarchy of life is implicit in Augustine's theology, then, as he writes "among those things which exist in any mode of being, and are distinct from God who made them, living things are ranked above inanimate objects... Among living things, the sentient rank above the insensitive... Among the sentient, the intelligent take precedence over the unthinking" (Augustine 2003: 447). Man is a part of nature and is of course subject to and dependant on God. Yet man, as we have seen, as a creature uniquely possess a will resembling God's and for this reason has a role in carrying out His plan in history, i.e. man's salvation, whose influence exceeds that of any other creature. The plan of God for reality, since it is the ultimate aim of life, is akin to life; it follows then that what is more alive or more worthy of life is what is more active in carrying out the plan. This anthropocentrism is not simply taken for granted or assumed because of man's presumed dignity but is taken to another level as the integral component of the entire system. As Gilson writes, man "is a part of nature, man also is subject to the divine order, nor can he escape it. But there is an important difference in the case of actions which depend on the human will. These are not performed under the compulsion of the divine order; they have a purpose of their own, and this purpose is to realize the divine order. With them it is not a matter of being subject to the law but of willing it and collaborating in its fulfillment" (Gilson 1967: 132).

¹⁶⁸ Similarly the equation of God with the mind and thereby of life with intelligence, since God alone of things is alive, meant that for Augustine, as he writes, life is not "something other than intelligence, as if He (God) could live without understanding" (Augustine 2003: 307).

an ability to be like God, one that involves total self-deprecation. When man presumes to do good or to find happiness or meaning in existence only a foolish pride, that repeats Adam's cardinal mistake, would attribute that action to anything but God's grace, and when man does evil there is none other responsible for it than himself.¹⁶⁹

It is clear from this also that in Augustine's theology, as will also be the case with the other figures that we review, the means to God—through adopting an attitude of total humility and obedience—is really one and the same with what the world already consists, because God's omnipotence necessitates that there is only one genuine concrete reality (Cochrane 1966: 567-568). The world cannot be enjoyed or experienced in its own right, but only in light of its ultimate end, because it is only through this end that enjoyment or meaning can come at all. In ancient philosophy the end goal, the aim that was sought, was different from the means to seek it. Meditation or intellectual pursuits were intended to achieve an end different from the pursuit itself, often, as we have seen with the Neo-Platonists, this was an abandonment of the self for the whole of the universe, or alternately, as with the Stoics, a reconciliation of the self to one's own existence. In the same way contemporary Christian perspectives in Augustine's time depicted a life lived well as a sort of passport to a higher and different sort of life with God. The end sought in ancient philosophy and early Christianity, then, was of a higher and detached quality. It had autonomous worth. It was an end goal which exceeded the bounds of the world in which men live on a daily basis. It was divorced from the practice intended to take the person to that end and so remained idiosyncratic and liable to reinterpretation and revisiting through the subject performing the action.

For Augustine, in contrast, the person of faith who lives a life of humility is for all intents and purposes already with God.¹⁷⁰ As Augustine phrases it, "This peace the heavenly City possesses in faith while on its pilgrimage" (Augustine 2003: 878). The destiny of man is transformative, but it is a transformation into what has always really been the case. By subordinating himself to God's will and so living in God's grace and approaching life with the proper mindset, the pious man has, quite simply, already achieved the end goal of his pursuit, with no need to work or experience the greater doubt that would accompany a more intangible

¹⁶⁹ Augustine evidently does not consider responsibility to humanity for its own fall as akin to a sort of pride because this is a negatives and so lacks existence. Only bad can come of man's actions that take place without acknowledging God's supremacy.

¹⁷⁰ In Arendt's words "if you love God you are in heaven even though you are still on Earth" (Arendt 1996: 32).

outcome. The aim has been achieved merely by pursuing the correct means towards achieving it. They are merely different moments of the same thing, union with an omniscient and pervasive God. As Barrow writes "The life lived aright is, as far as is possible to human nature, of the same essential quality as the life which is eternal, namely the life of God... Means and ends are the same things and cannot be separated; the life has, and seeks, no reward except itself" (Barrow 1950: 193).¹⁷¹

And just as Augustine equates means and ends, so the world for him, since it is ultimately headed in only one direction, must be used as a means to an end for the goal, coming to God. Using the world in this way is among the tests of a man's faith, of his willingness not to put his subjective experience of the material world, his actual relationship to its creatures and things, above the end goal of life, union with God. In regard to the things of the world a citizen of the City of God will not let "himself be taken in by them or distracted from his course towards God" (Augustine 2003: 877). This is even more the case because, as we have seen, God made the world as a means for man to come to Him. The point of everything in existence for Augustine—since God necessarily knew that man would fall yet created him anyway—is for man, the lone creature with dynamism in nature by virtue of his will, to reach a higher state of union with the divinity, through adjusting himself to that which alone possesses truth and substance and is thus the basis of all.¹⁷² With this the whole of reality was drawn into man's purposes. The world had begun with the appearance of man upon it. Again, man alone could do evil and so alone was created to one day be perfected, as God must have known prior to the creation, and so the world was intended by God only to serve as a means for man to come to Him. Such a view serves to make all worldly things relative, as Arendt point out, i.e. equally worthless and transitory in favour of God, because they are merely a means to Him (Arendt 1996: 14). The world has no meaning in itself, it is there to be used and not to be enjoyed or loved in itself. The authentic self

¹⁷¹ This linking of means to end is in my view a really novel aspect of Augustine's theology and one that would have truly lasting and unintended repercussions. The expectation that means and ends are one in the same is clearly commensurate with a systemic perspective which endeavours to encompass all of reality within its explanatory framework and so leaves no room for anything beyond it.

¹⁷² As Augustine writes, "The selfsame things are used in a good manner by one person and in an evil manner by another. The person who uses them in an evil manner holds fast to them with love and is tangled up with them. That is to say, he is controlled by things that he ought to control, and, in setting them up as goods for himself that need to be put in order and treated properly, he holds himself back from the (true) good. However, the person who uses them rightly shows that they are good, but not his own goods... Hence he does not attach himself to them with love... he is completely above them, possessing and governing them when there is need; he is ready to lose them, and more ready not to have them" (Augustine 2010(2): 28; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.15.33.113).

only possesses reality through its connection to God while the inauthentic self defines itself through its relation to the world that He has created (Caringella 2010: 276).

Augustine claims that the pious man must use and adopt an attitude to the material world of a pilgrim on a journey.¹⁷³ He must use the world as one uses the objects at an inn attaching no importance to things in themselves outside of how they can aid in advancing him toward the end to which they are put, or in other words only in view of arriving at God (Gilson 1967: 168). The important thing for Augustine was for man not to elevate the world above himself, man's own quest for God or perfection. And in this sense the most important facet of this perspective is to give the world no autonomy from one's desired end, i.e. God. This is the only approach that can be taken to the world by a citizen of the City of God. The things of the world have no relationship with one another nor does man have any relationship to them in the absence of God. As Arendt writes again "All earthly goods are viewed under the aspect of love's final goal... Since it is used, the world loses its independent meaningfulness and thus ceases to tempt man. The right attitude to the world is to use it" (Arendt 1996: 33).¹⁷⁴ The world ought to be used by man as commensurate with his own need, a need determined by his striving after the only goal worth seeking in life, God. This applies of course to Augustine's own thoughts. As he concludes one of his most important works *De Trinitate* with an admonition to his readers that "whatever I have said in these books as coming from You, may they acknowledge who are Yours; but if anything as coming from myself, may You and they who are Yours forgive me" (Augustine 2002: 224: *De Trinitate* 15, 28).¹⁷⁵

The natural world, then, not only lacks an independent existence. as we have seen, because it is a static lower world under man, nor does it simply lack an inherent dynamism such as man possess through his will, nor is it also less alive because its lack of intelligence places it farther from God than is man, or because it is less active in bringing about God's plan, the aim

¹⁷³ God tests man's fitness to join with Him by how he approaches the world, "In one city love of God has been given first place, in the other, love of self" (Augustine 2003: 573).

¹⁷⁴ This extends of course to non-human creatures as well of whom Augustine writes that they "have no feelings.... Since they have no rational association with us, not having been endowed with reason as we are, and hence it is by a just arrangement of the Creator that their life and death is subordinated to our needs" (Augustine 2003: 31). Man is clearly closer to God than to the animal by nature and is thereby a being "of more excellence and greater worth than all the other creatures" (Augustine 2003: 1072).

¹⁷⁵ A similar passage appears at the end of the *City of God*, when he writes that, "I have discharged my debt, with the completion of God's help, of this huge work. It may be too much for some, too little for others. Of both these groups I ask forgiveness. But of those for whom it is enough I make the request: that they do not thank me, but join with me in rendering thanks to God. Amen. Amen" (Augustine 2003: 1091).

for existence, but it is also implicitly passive because the only way for a human being to approach it rightly, for his actions to have any legitimacy or reality, is also simply by treating it as a means to an end. This is clearly a pretty bleak and monomaniacal view of man's relationship to the natural world and to life in general which leaves little room for variation or difference, or for giving the world an autonomy from the self. In the same way Augustine's view of man is essentially one-dimensional. A man is either for or against, with or not with, God. There are the good who "cling to God" and the bad who "do not cleave to him" (Augustine 2003: 471). There is no in between, no room for any alternative or doubt.

Fear, especially, is the experience of a man who is insufficiently obedient, whose fearlessness is lacking in his submission to God's will. The fears of such a man could only be attributed to his slavish attachment to the mutable material world and this is a sign of his separation from God. Man's confusion about things in the world, as we have seen, comes from endeavouring to see them from his own perspective. In doing so he misunderstands that it is God who both enables him to see and always works for the good no matter how adverse circumstances may seem. "It is the nature of things considered in itself, without regard to our convenience or inconvenience, that gives glory to the Creator" (Augustine 2003: 476).¹⁷⁶ A man without fear is a man who "enjoys perfect liberty," in Gilson's words, because he conforms all of his expectations and performs all of his actions for the sake of God in order to partake in the only state of freedom that, ironically, is possible, total obedience to the dictates of a Deity and a revealed system that can alone make any claim to truth (Gilson 1967: 168). A man of faith should above all be fearless at the prospect of this fallen world's end.¹⁷⁷ He should look forward to death as a relief from "this life with all its great calamities" (Augustine 2003: 498). For this

¹⁷⁶ Augustine gives examples of this blind obedience, in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son and in Isaac's acceptance at being tricked by Jacob (Augustine 2003: 701).

¹⁷⁷ As Augustine writes, "the goldsmith's furnace also furnishes a comparison. In its narrow oven there are three things: fire, gold, and straw. And there you can see an image of the whole world; there's straw there, there's gold there, there's fire there; the straw is burnt up, the fire burns hot, the gold is tried. So too in the whole of this world there are the just, there are the wicked, there is tribulation; the world is like the goldsmith's furnace, the just like the gold, the wicked like the straw, tribulation like the fire. The gold would never be purified, would it, unless the straw were burnt up? It so happens that the wicked are reduced to ashes; you see, when they blaspheme and grumble against God, they turn into ashes. There the purified gold—the just, who patiently bear all the vexations of this world, and praise God in their tribulations—the purified gold is consigned to the treasure chests of God. God has His treasure chests, of course, in which to put the purified gold; He also has His dirt disposal unit, in which to dump the ashes of the straw. All of it leaves this world. You just see what you are yourself. I mean, the fire is bound to come; if it finds you as gold, it will remove the impurities from you; if it finds you as straw, it will burn you up, and reduce you to ashes. Choose which you are to be. Because the one thing you cannot say is: "I will do without fire." You are already in the goldsmith's furnace, where fire is bound to come. You are bound to be there even more, because under no circumstances can you do without fire" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/4, 180-181; Sermon 113a, 11).

reason man should embrace calamity, as of course embodied in Rome's fall, as heralding the coming of God's Kingdom and only expect "with increased confidence the everlasting blessedness of the heavenly city" (Augustine Epistle CXXXVII, cited in Deane 1963: 75).¹⁷⁸

Augustine's Theology of History

When Augustine reflects on the movement of history in the first half of *City of God* he does so from the viewpoint of a man who knows what the end point of the world is to be and with a keen sense of the indispensability of every event for bringing out the larger whole. As with the Christian belief in a soul beyond circumstance able to somehow see all of reality as a whole after death, so Augustine believed that at the end of time, for those taken into God, the illusion of time would be dispelled, and man would come to see everything as it is, how everything that occurred in history was necessary to bring about God's larger purpose (Arendt 1996: 59). As Arendt writes, for Augustine happiness and fulfillment can never reside in the present but only in the past, through realizing how the world has fitted into the plan, and this means really only through faith in the promise of what is yet to come, through "belief in an absolute future with God" (Arendt 1996: 49). Even the life course of an individual, its apparent irreversibility and the uniqueness that we attribute to our lives in retrospect as a result of this, is seen in this conception to be something inherently unreal (Arendt 1996: 60). This also means importantly that human beings can never take comfort in the fact that they don't know, can never feel a sense of awe at the mystery of the world strung out before them. Not really anyway, because although Augustine repeatedly writes of the mysteries of existence, these are implicitly the mysteries of a God who is uniquely and ultimately connected to man.

Augustine's conception of history, as we just saw, is that of a finite world created for a purpose, not a cyclical pattern of growth and decline.¹⁷⁹ The evil in the world, given God's foreknowledge of all events only appears to be so, is only an illusion. Since the world is necessarily headed to an end goal, it is the inability to understand how God uses a thing and our

¹⁷⁸ As he would preach in response to Rome's fall, "Trouble is like fire; does it find you to be gold? It removes your impurities. Does it find you to be straw? It reduces you to ashes. So it's not the pressures, which certainly abound, that are the scandals. So what are the scandals? Those little speeches, those words in which we are told, "Look what Christian times are producing," that's where the scandals are. You see, the point of saying this to you is to make you blaspheme against Christ, if you love the world" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/3, 365; Sermon 81, 7).

¹⁷⁹ As Deane writes, this is envisioned as "a straight-line development, with a beginning, a climax, and an end" (Deane 1963: 71)

choices to advance His plan, how it fits into the overall course of events, that makes something seem evil but this is ultimately not so (Arendt 1996: 60). In this light evil is not just a privation in that it in itself has no existence, as discussed, but also does not exist because it is ultimately not used for evil. God brings good out of evil, Augustine claims using a well known metaphor of his time, in the same way that in a picture touches of black "in appropriate places" contribute to the beauty of the whole (Augustine 2003: 455). Since God is beyond time, his plan exceeds the comprehension of any mortal bound to the perceptions of a solitary lifetime. For this reason God's motives in making the world what it is are inscrutable, in the first place because He is divine, but on another level because the implications of every event are so far reaching, with repercussions potentially stretching across not just the whole of nature, but across the whole of history, across the sum total of all existence that has ever and will ever be, that the meaning behind any event is impossible for anyone bound within time to construe. We must trust in God and His plan no matter how disappointing or confusing the perils in the world that at times befall us by remembering that it is our own imperfect standard that is doing the judging rather than God's (Rist 1994: 275).

In this way history can only be seen as a piece, as an interlinked whole in which every event has an impact on every other. Therefore, every element no matter how seemingly meaningless is necessary for the bringing about of God's plan, and for the same reason nothing can be seen to have autonomy from this plan, from the larger purpose revealed by Scripture. The apparent evil in the world is thereby an illusion created by the human inability to understand how to use or appreciate the world in a way commensurate with God's will. As he writes "there are so many things which do not suit the inadequacy and frailty of our mortal flesh, which has already come under deserved punishment, many things which cause distress, like fire, cold, wild animals, and so on... (Those who fear them) do not observe the value of those things in their own sphere and in their own nature, their position in the splendour of the providential order and the contribution they make by their own special beauty to the whole material scheme" (Augustine 2003: 453). The world exists because God continues, as we have seen, to think it into existence, but the world in itself has no sacredness and by the same token this means that "as a continuing historical act of God nature was subsumed under history" (Glover 1984: 180).

The idea that the past is a place that is inherently different from the present or inherently out of mind, and so a venue for something different, clearly has no place in this view of history

either, nor does the prospect that history could have turned out in any other way than how it did. As Markus writes, in Augustine's Christianized worldview history "like other educational disciplines... gains admission in the Christian round of studies in so far – and only in so far – as it can serve as an aid to the understanding of the scriptures" (Markus 1970: 5). His explanation for each and every event in the past is tied to making straight the paths to enable the Church's emergence and inevitable triumph as tied to the end of the world and the return of Christ. The past either materially prepared the way for the present or spiritually provided examples to the faithful of the attitude to take to life in order to find redemption through the demonstration of obedience. History in this way was a sort of "laboratory of values" meant to serve as a guide to the faithful on how to conduct themselves in accordance with God's will (Barrow 1950: 163). These pointed the way, as Cochrane suggests, to "the disciplining of human beings to the knowledge and love of their proper good" (Cochrane 1966: 567). Augustine repeatedly writes in the first portion of the *City of God*, for instance, that the Romans' immense success as a civilization can be attributed to their love of glory and devotion to their city in order that they could suppress the evils of the different nations and bring them under one common culture and government (Augustine 2003: 197-201). He examines the principal sources of Roman history at the time and comes to a very different conclusion about Rome's past than the pagan historians. Augustine did not claim that Rome would be the last Empire, and viewed any claim to foretell the future in this way as an act of hubris, but he nevertheless believed that "it was God's design to conquer the world through her (Rome), to unite the world into the single community of the Roman commonwealth and the Roman laws, and so to impose peace throughout its length and breadth" (Augustine 2003: 787).¹⁸⁰ And naturally, for Augustine, it was not just Rome's rise and fall but the entire course of human and natural events that had been preordained to serve this larger purpose (Augustine 2003: 179).

History was thus a linear process stretched out between man's creation in the Garden and the end of the world and inevitable betterment of a fallen humanity. Even the placement of every grain of sand upon every beach in every corner of the world was arranged by God so as to serve this end. For otherwise their creation would have been pointless, something which

¹⁸⁰ In addition, the Romans of old, Augustine argued, as the most valorous of all peoples committed to receiving the praise of others for no other reason than for its own sake, even at the cost of their lives or material well being, were meant to serve as an example to the inhabitants of the City of God on how to love the Divinity (Augustine 2003: 211).

Augustine views as impossible, and in this way the old merely exists as a means to bring about the "new," is completely absorbed into it.¹⁸¹ "For no event is to no purpose under the all embracing government of God's providence, even if the reason for it is hidden from us" (Augustine 2003: 508). And to believe otherwise was unthinkable given the assumption that the world had no purpose beyond man's redemption and that to use the world in any other way but towards this end was ultimately impossible.¹⁸² This implies the idea that everything, no matter how dehumanizing or egregious, is better to have happened than not to, because of its place in God's ultimate plan (Rist 1994: 279). An omnipotent God with foresight again, Augustine reasons, would never have created something unless he planned for it to ultimately bring about the good. At the end of history when man becomes absorbed into God he will see how everything corresponded to God's good intentions. Thus history is used as a means of coming to terms with otherness but this time, as will be the case in succeeding philosophies of history that this work will examine, as a history of the future, a safe and secure and indeed happy and perfect future (Arendt 1996: 49).¹⁸³

The single most important event in history for Augustine, its "climax," as Deane phrases it, was Christ's Incarnation (Deane 1963: 14). It was only through becoming a man, as opposed to man actively raising himself to God, as was assumed by his contemporaries, that the gap between the human and the divine created at the fall could be bridged. Since man could clearly not re-establish the connection to God in his fallen state man needed a divine mediator. Christ was not born from lust, but through a virgin, therefore, Augustine concluded, he did not bear within him the stain of the original sin carried by Adam's progeny. Christ came to earth to pay the price of sin for man, the death that he was made to incur after the fall.¹⁸⁴ Christ had founded his Church as a common venue for the faithful to ease their coming to God "so that man might

¹⁸¹ "All temporal things have been positioned in this order of things in such a way that future things could not succeed past ones unless they were to cease to exist, so that the whole beauty of the ages is fully accomplished in their kind" (Augustine 2010(2): 103; *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.15.42.146).

¹⁸² As opposed to the confusion and contradiction implicit in secular history, then, Christians place their "reliance on the inspired history belonging to our religion and consequently have no hesitation in treating as utterly false anything which fails to conform to it" (Augustine 2003: 815).

¹⁸³ This is a faith in one's knowledge of the final end of humanity and its world, a true "synthesis of universal history... because it is a matter of forming one organized whole of the knowledge of what is seen and the knowledge of what is yet to be" (Gilson 1967: 175).

¹⁸⁴ In Christ the "word became flesh," God's perfect wisdom was carried to men. He was not a mediator "with an immortal body, like the bodies on high (i.e. the pagan gods)...(but) a mediator linked with us in our loneliness by reason of the mortal nature of his body, and yet able to render us truly divine assistance for our purification and liberation... by his unique resemblance to God" (Augustine 2003: 365).

have a path to man's God through the man who was God" (Augustine 2003: 430). And in dying Christ absorbed man's sins (Augustine 2003: 752). Christ's resurrection after death, mortality constituting the embodiment of the consequences of sin, made available to man an avenue for escaping sin. This is made possible through the Eucharist available in His Church by which man partakes in Christ's life, humility, and death and so becomes a part of His sinless and immortal body, and thus of His triumph over sin. The Incarnation, then, is the vehicle by which man's salvation is carried out. "Thus by the death of One so powerful justice was commended and power promised to us helpless mortals" (Augustine 2002: 124; *De Trinitate* 13,14). The example provided by His life, and having faith in what He did, serves as the path to redemption for fallen man. Christ brought the Word, the promise of the divine "light" of intelligibility taken formerly to be remote and beyond man, down to Earth.¹⁸⁵

It was the inability of the Platonists, in Augustine's conception, to recognize this fact that was the crux of their difference with the Christians and the less perfect and complete deliverance which their philosophy offered. They were unable to recognize "the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord; If only you had been able to see his incarnation, in which He took a human soul and body, as the supreme instance of grace!" (Augustine 2003: 406). Rather than a divine *nous* which eternally and abstractedly emanates the world from the One, with Christ's death and resurrection man was given the possibility of incorporation into the constituting principle of the Universe itself. And, consequently, the possibility was created for those with faith of being reborn into a new type of human life through adherence to Christ and obedience to his teachings. This is a path which leaves no room for uncertainty or any alternative because it brings the transcendent perfection presumed to reside beyond the material realm down to the level of man himself. "This is the mediator, the stretching out of a hand to those who lay fallen" (Augustine 2003: 405). This is a route to the Deity that demands total unyielding faith, for only an act of the divine that is implicitly unintelligible to man with his fallen will, but which, at the same time, is capable of lifting man to God, can provide any redemption.¹⁸⁶ And Augustine's complaint that Porphyry claimed that "he has never become acquainted with any philosophical sect... which

¹⁸⁵ Christ acts as the key or "principle" to intelligibility for those who believe in Him. "When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... The principle then having a soul and flesh, purifies the soul and the flesh of believers" (Augustine 2003: 404). "His purpose was that we should be changed for the better, and by participation in his immortality and his righteousness should lose our condition of sinfulness and mortality" (Augustine 2003: 992).

¹⁸⁶ God "clothed Himself in humanity and gave to man the spirit of His love by the mediation of a man, so that by this love men might come to Him who formerly was so far away from them, far from mortals in his immortality, from the changeable in His changelessness" (Augustine 2003: 414-415).

would offer a universal way for the liberation of the soul" ought to be seen in light of the belief that any authentic path to God would necessarily have to be complete, total, and exclusive (Augustine 2003: 421).

Man's place of great dignity in nature, next to God, was proved by Christ's human life, and the truth of his message was all the more assured through being carried to man by God Himself without the need for any human prophet. God's love for man and intentions for him were demonstrated by causing His own Son to live among men. Once again this is a selfless love which expects nothing in return and so indicates the kind of love which men must strive to emulate to gain admittance to the City of God. The humbleness of Christ's origins and life, that a God was born to a carpenter etc., also indicate the uselessness of all human valuations or trappings, the transitoriness and unreality of all human efforts. God spread His Word by means of fishermen of limited education, "men of humble birth, without position, without education," in order to show that the incredible rise and triumph of His creed through the Church could be attributed to nothing other than to its sheer power of truth (Augustine 2003: 832). Their success showed that worldly matters and learning, the humanist intellectual achievements of Greece and Rome built up laboriously for a thousand years, were worthless by comparison with a simple faith in God.¹⁸⁷ Their example served to show man that any pretensions to vanity that he might possess were illusory and that the only true path that he is worthy to pursue is not one that follows after his own efforts, experiences, or ideas but one that is geared to obedience to the only end worth pursuing, God.

Augustine never presumed, and repeatedly asserts, that no man can know when the world would actually end. But Augustine's theological speculation and faith lead him to believe unquestionably that man would be redeemed and joined to God and that it was man's approach to history, meaning to the promise of perfection in the future, that is above all a test of his faith.¹⁸⁸ As Löwith argues such a scheme, which removes from history any intrinsic meaning or interest

¹⁸⁷ Moreover, and ironically, Augustine argues that the eagerness with which their message, and the belief in events so improbable, was grasped, served to demonstrate that it was providence that drove them. "It is incredible that the world believed so incredible an event; and it is incredible that men of no birth, no standing, no learning, and so few of them, should have been able to persuade so effectively, the whole world, including the learned men" (Augustine 2003: 1028).

¹⁸⁸ As Brown writes "in his attitude to history, Augustine claimed to have gone further than the pagan Platonists. They could only grasp the immutable content to contemplate a timeless Deity, they could answer none of the questions posed, by 'the close woven sequence of the centuries'... They could not trace the long space of the ages, place landmarks on that unfolding process by which the human race flows onward like a vast river, nor seize the final culmination of its appointed ends" (Brown 1967: 317).

in itself, is the hallmark of Western historiography (Löwith 1964: 18). But as opposed to what he claims, it is not the mere existence of an end in itself which lends this creed so much power but rather history's connection to the ultimate overcoming of all error through the attribution of man as its cause. History in this light became not something related to or set against myth as perhaps it had been in the Classical world. Rather there was no room for myth in this conception, no room or space for engaging with anything mysterious, remote, or primeval beyond man and his world. In contrast, history comes to be firmly grounded in the present and the continuum of time on which the present depends. Christ was a personage who existed in a time located within man's own history just as man has been present in the world since its creation. Christ's historical life shows not only that there is no myth, in the sense of the word as it was used by the Greeks, but that there is nothing outside of the relationship between man and God.¹⁸⁹

And so, just as the whole of the natural world had become historical, it was taken to have no autonomy from a God uniquely connected to man, so everything that occurred in time was absorbed into man and the larger purpose of bringing him to his ultimate end. This was an end that would remain basically unchanged from the beginning of the world until its close, the eventual coming of man to the Almighty. In contrast to earlier perspective on the incredible, then, events such as the Incarnation and miracles were not in themselves singular or inexplicable, according to Augustine, rather they served to demonstrate our faith in God's power through our belief in them even in the face of what we know from mundane experience to be impossible. History became in this conception a sort of object against which to envisage the disclosure of the active force that moved it (Cochrane 1966: 460). A progressive disclosure, in other words, through setting the conditions for a making known of what had truly moved man and the course of events all along, i.e. God. This was a movement that could only be measured or perceived in light of its promised end. An end that simply had to be believed in, which had to be uncritically taken as undeniable and presumed through faith, a faith based, but not premised, upon reason. And indeed universal history is clearly only possible when one presumes a knowledge of the

¹⁸⁹ As Brown writes, "the whole course of human history, therefore, could be thought of as laden with meanings which might be seized, particularly by the believer, in full by the seer... In his *City of God*, Augustine was one of the first to sense and give monumental expression to a new form of intellectual excitement. Plotinus, when he wrote on 'Providence,' had already presented the natural world as a harmony of minutely-articulate parts. The same sense of wonder, which is so marked a feature of the way in which Plotinus speaks of the Universe – the *Cosmos* – will flood into the language of Augustine as he speaks of the marvellous and perfectly ordered distribution of the ages" (Brown 1967: 317).

future, as can only be construed through some kind of faith, even if it is a faith that follows reason. And it is in the association of faith with history, the linear over eternal conception of time that this implies, and the consequent absorption of everything into a divine and human history taken to be one and the same, which is most conspicuously demonstrated in Augustine's *City of God*.¹⁹⁰

It was this perspective on the past that constituted Augustine's creation of a new conception of history, one which nothing in existence could escape because God and His plan, the battle between sin and salvation, and the corresponding emergence of the obedient, characterized all times and places (Brown 1967: 321). This was the undoing of the primordial error of agency that Adam had clearly caused, coping with otherness in the appropriate way, and from this the promise of attaining a truly perfected problem-free state. It was the totality of the Christian God that Augustine envisioned, his omniscience, and the promised completeness and finality of his appointed end that allowed nothing to escape His design, which no doubt brought a sense of meaning and security, a comfort to all those who sought a clear and definite explanation for all in life that exceeded their grasp. And this position on the past served, in Bourke's words, to break "the wheel of fate... (by showing) that there is hope for release from the cares of this world, that human life is not a rat-race or an enclosed treadmill but a short journey to the promised land" (Bourke 1995: 295). With this conception of time all devout Christians could at least have an understanding, which would become so influential in the Middle Ages and thereafter, of what was happening to them and to the surrounding world, even in cases where circumstance seemingly exceeded human comprehension.

Judgement Day and Man's Perfection in God's Kingdom

Augustine, like many of his Christian successors and predecessors, argued that the course of the world's history was divided into seven ages, with the last representing the eternal Sabbath

¹⁹⁰ As Gilson writes, Augustine's theology is a true "synthesis of universal history... because it is a matter of forming one organized whole of the knowledge of what is seen and the knowledge of what is yet to be" (Gilson 1967: 175). For this reason also then history as tied to an eyewitness account, as it had been in the ontologically minded Classical worldview, also became unimportant. Faith became the driver of history, faith in its outcome, as discerned through revelation, and in its past, as obtained from the light of truth presented by Scripture.

of God's Kingdom, a time when man would finally come to rest in God's grace.¹⁹¹ By counting the spans of life of the generations from Adam Augustine concluded that the earth was nearly six thousand years old. The world was winding down as it aged. Its generative power was decreasing, as was clearly evident from the longer spans of life enjoyed by the patriarchs in the Old Testament and by the great stature evidently possessed by long dead giants, as likely determined from the fossilized remnants of the bones of dinosaurs (Augustine 2003: 609). As opposed to ideas of progress associated with Church Fathers such as Eusebius, as we have seen, Augustine believed that the errors of the world were increasing not lessening as the end approached. Using a well worn analogy of Rome as a city in old age, but not in the venerable sense as the ancients thought, Augustine writes that the world was breaking down like an old man breaks down as he nears death. "You are surprised that the world is losing its grip? That the world is grown old? Think of a man: he is born, he grows up, he becomes old. Old age has its many complaints: coughing, shaking, failing eyesight, anxious, terribly tired... The world is old; it is full of pressing tribulations... Do not hold on to the old man, the world; do not refuse to regain your youth in Christ" (Augustine Sermon 81, cited in Brown 1967: 297).

Life for man prior to the City of God in the earthly proving ground is what Augustine called the *saeculum*, a Latin word that approximates our notion of a lifetime. The *saeculum* was the mixture within the human population between the members of the earthly and the divine cities (Markus 2006: 39). To those who would attribute the disaster of Rome's fall to the wide adoption of the Christian God, Augustine insists that disasters have occurred throughout history because this is the nature of our fallen earthly life.¹⁹² ¹⁹³ As a result not of Rome's, but of

¹⁹¹ The first age of creation stretched from Adam until Noah's flood. The second extended to Abraham, the third to David, the fourth to the captivity in Babylon, and the fifth from that to Christ's return. It was Christ's coming that had signalled that the world had entered its sixth and last age before the rise of the eternal City of God (Augustine 2003: 1091). History was "a magnificent, harmonious melody" ushering in Christ's return in which every stage complemented and laid the groundwork for the one to follow it (Funkenstein 1986: 260). Like the day night cycle empires had risen and fallen throughout history as the message of faith had reached ever more perfect levels only to fall by the wayside due to failures of the will and to the inevitable obstinacy of fallen man, surviving as an empowered seed to be germinated in the conditions of the next stage (Oort 1991: 99).

¹⁹² As he writes, in response "to those who jeer... when any temporal disaster comes upon God's servants, such people ask, 'Where is your God now?' Let those scoffers tell us where their gods are, when the same thing happens to them" (Augustine 2003: 41).

¹⁹³ "Here am I talking, here am I shouting, here am I explaining. Who's listening to me?... Listen to what it all means. There are baleful, evil days. Is it here we spend evil days, from the moment we were thrown out of paradise? Not only did our elders complain about their days, their grandparents too complained about their days. People have never been pleased with the days they lived in. But the days of the ancestors please their descendants, and they too were pleased with days they hadn't experienced—and that's precisely why they thought them pleasant. It's what's present that is sharply felt" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/2, 340; Sermon 25, 3).

Adam's fall, all mankind was doomed by birth by virtue of original sin. But everyone has a chance of being saved. No one is doomed except by their own action, in the sense of their disobedience, to be excluded from the Divine City. Until the end of time the residents of the two cities will continue to be comingled and consequently good and bad people will appear in all human institutions.¹⁹⁴

As he writes "There's a bad world, there's a good world; the bad world is all the bad people in the world, and the good world is all the good people in the world. We notice the same thing very often in a field. This field is full of what crop? Wheat. And again we can say, and with complete truth, 'The field is full of straw.' There's a tree, it's full of fruit. Someone else says, 'It's full of leaves.' The one who says it's full of fruit is telling the truth, and the one who says it's full of leaves is telling the truth. The full complement of leaves hasn't left the fruit with no room, and the full complement of fruit hasn't crowded out the leaves. It's full of both, but the wind seeks out the one, the cultivator picks the other. So then, when you hear, *Woe to the world because of scandals*, don't panic. Love the law of God, and it won't be a scandal for you" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/3, 361; Sermon 81, 3).¹⁹⁵

Because we all partake in Adam's original sin no one can be assured of redemption. And for Augustine the vast number of men who live and die as sinners clearly suggested that mankind mostly consists of those who will never know the City of God. At the end of time, they will be cast into hell to suffer eternal damnation.¹⁹⁶ In a very real sense their lives merely exist to serve

¹⁹⁴ At the beginning of the last book of the *City of God*, Augustine speculates that the number of elect who will receive God's grace is equal to the number of the fallen angels. He states that God must have foreknown about the fallen angels before He created them, just as he foreknew Adam's sin, and so He created man in order that the faithful could replenish the number of the angels in heaven.

¹⁹⁵ For this reason not even the Church is perfect in Augustine's eyes nor are the inhabitants of the City of God only to be found among those who existed after the Incarnation (Rankin 2010: 105). Pagans potentially could be members of the City of God and this is why Augustine claims that Christ taught that men ought to love their enemies (Augustine 2003: 896). Humility, then, also means realizing that salvation lies with God's choice and not with man's.

¹⁹⁶ "Think about any tortures you like, extend your imagination to any human punishments you can think of; compare them with gehenna, and everything you can think of is trivial. Here they are temporal, there eternal, both the torturer and the tortured. Those people aren't still suffering, are they, who suffered at that time when Rome was sacked? That rich man, though, is still suffering in hell. He was on fire, he is on fire, he will be on fire; he will come to the last judgment; he will get back his flesh, not to his benefit, but to his added punishment. Those are the pains we should fear, if we fear God. Whatever people may suffer here, if they let themselves be corrected by it, it means their improvement; if they are not corrected by it, it means a double condemnation. I mean, they pay the temporal penalty here, and there they will experience the eternal one" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/10, 443-444; Sermon 397, 4).

as a means of enabling the redemption of those who will be saved. Adam opened "from the same door of mortality" the path of the two cities "so that the Celestial City, on pilgrimage in this world, may learn, through this very comparison with the vessels of wrath, that it should not trust in its own free will" (Augustine 2003: 635).¹⁹⁷

In response to Rome's fall, then, Augustine presented to the pagans and to his own congregation alike the dream of a truly eternal and happy city free of peril that would be ushered in on Christ's return to Earth.¹⁹⁸ A City in which the highest hopes of Greco-Roman philosophy would be achieved and surpassed, and one that did not date merely from the founding of Rome, as with the Roman calendar, but into an endless future (Barrow 1950: 192). To the pagans and the doubters it was "to this country that we invite you, and exhort you to add yourself to the number of our citizens... (to) take possession of the heavenly Country... (where) you will reign there in truth and forever" (Augustine 2003: 86). And the remarkable characteristics of this Kingdom, the perfected state that man can expect to enjoy upon his absorption into the Deity are most notably outlined by Augustine in Book 22 at the end of the *City of God*. In the divine city man's nature would be changed or rather fulfilled. At Judgement Day, God would resurrect the bodies of the faithful who were long decayed remaking them from the dust of the Earth as he did with Adam and Eve (Augustine 2003: 937).¹⁹⁹ Every human being, Augustine argued, would be resurrected at the prime of their life, their "limit of perfection," at around thirty years of age (Augustine 2003: 1055).²⁰⁰ Inhabitants of the City of God who had died even through abortions,

¹⁹⁷ However it should be remembered that Augustine's view of salvation, while restricted, was, in comparison to its Neo-Platonic rival, completely egalitarian, since it was centered on obedience rather than education. It was, moreover, one of which seemingly successful examples, in the lives of the saints and martyrs, "were reassuringly visible... in every city of the Mediterranean" (Brown 1996: 49).

¹⁹⁸ As he would preach shortly after Rome's fall: "And if only this example availed to induce some fear into the rest of us, so that we restrained our evil desires from thirsting for the world, and from being hell-bent on the most pernicious pleasures! God, after all, is demonstrating in this way how shaky and fleeting are all the vanities and misleading follies of this age. So let us not go on grumbling against the Lord, as we tend to do. There's only one flail, though, experienced by the threshing-floor, both to cut up the straw and to cleanse the grain; there's only one fire experienced by the goldsmith's furnace, both to reduce the straw to ashes and to eliminate the dross from the gold... Weigh up Rome against Christ, weigh up the whole earth against Christ; weigh up heaven and earth against Christ; nothing created can balance the creator, no work be compared with the craftsman... So let us bear with whatever God may wish us to bear with, seeing that, like a doctor, he knows what pain is useful for curing and healing us... But what work will there be for patience to have, if we suffer no adversity? So why should we refuse to endure temporal evils? Do we, perhaps, dread being made perfect?" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/10, 443-444; Sermon 397, 9).

¹⁹⁹ This would even occur for those who had been sadly ingested by other human beings, during the siege and sack of Rome in 410 for instance, and hence had become part of the bodies of others (Augustine 2003: 1062-1063).

²⁰⁰ This age was generally held in the ancient world to represent the peak of one's mental and physical powers and was also roughly the age at which Jesus was thought to have died.

in infancy, or who had lost limbs would similarly be brought back into existence at this ideal age and with their "ideal" body type.

In this ideal body the purpose for even seemingly pointless and so mysterious things that constitute man's physical form, such as eyebrows, their ability to add beauty and dignity to the whole, would become evident (Augustine 2003: 1074), as would the purpose of the "miracle" of the distinctiveness of the human face when compared to other creatures in nature (Augustine 2003: 983).²⁰¹ The uprightness of man's carriage "facing towards the sky" so as to admonish him to contemplate heavenly things, while the beasts face the ground, the mobility of man's tongue and hands "so adapted for speaking and writing" (Augustine 2003: 1073). Are not all these things "sufficient indication" Augustine rhetorically asks "that a body of this kind was designed as an adjunct to the soul" (Augustine 2003: 1073).

Resurrected man would thus change into a new type of being one who was a part of God and who, although still embodied, would not be bound by any part of the material world. Such a man, as Augustine repeatedly stresses, would have a "spiritual body."²⁰² Unlike Adam who was still bound by the material but who could fulfill its demands merely through his will, spiritual man would not need to eat, to breathe, or to perform any other physical function unless it was his wish to do. For man in his spiritual body these things would become "a possibility, not a necessity" (Augustine 2003: 535). In a spiritual body the material, and so otherness, would not merely be transcended but actually completely reconciled to human existence. Man would come to realize his true place in the both the material and spiritual worlds, that physical reality exists for him and that he is actually, and was intended to be, more than it, not simply a part of it, as Adam had once thought. Man will thus be subject to no part of his animality, rather his animality would be perfected through becoming wholly subordinate to his Godlike spiritual nature.

²⁰¹ Augustine writes that "even in the body, which is something we have in common with the brute creatures... even here what evidence we find of the goodness of God, of the providence of the mighty Creator... The shape and size of the whole body" demonstrates that man was intended to be God's earthly vessel (Augustine 2003: 1073).

²⁰² "The flesh will with equal propriety be called spiritual... (The body) will submit to the spirit with a ready obedience" (Augustine 2003: 533). "When we arrive at that state of peace, there will be no longer a life that ends in death, but a life that is life in sure and sober truth; there will be no animal body to 'weigh down the soul'... there will be a spiritual body with no cravings, a body subdued in every part to the will" (Augustine 2003: 878). Man's body will have the substance of flesh but will be nourished by the spirit and hence will not be that of an animal but will be wholly free of any corruption or imperfection (Augustine 2003: 1076).

There will also be a "healing" of man's misdirected fallen will in the Kingdom. Augustine believed that the will was only truly "free" when it was subject to nothing other than itself (Barrow 1950 152-153). As we saw, fallen man, since he was forced to exist in a world in which he was subject to the material has a will which can only choose between sins and which, in a manner of speaking, is locked in a struggle with itself, that is to say between what God wills and what the material world drives man to will. When God makes the will whole, by bringing it into Himself and so relieving it of its material constraints, He will consequently elevate it to its real or authentic state. This final freedom of man would not be a natural created power to choose whether to sin, as was the case with Adam, but would be a permanent gift of God's grace accomplished by changing Adam's actual nature. The God-man "will share with the angels the endless enjoyment of God Most High, whereas that first man, in all that bliss of paradise, had no certainty about his future" (Augustine 2003: 444). As we saw, because man has not the power to redeem himself, because he lives in a world of sin and because his soul was created from nothing and therefore is not in itself supremely good, his salvation can only come through a unilateral act of mercy on the part of God to take those eligible to become his sons into Himself. "The choice of the will, then, is genuinely free only when it is not subservient to faults and sins. God gave it that freedom, and now that it has been lost, through its own faults, it can be restored only by him who had the power to give it at the beginning" (Augustine 2003: 569). The potential of the will and of man is only achieved when it is brought into God. Man will be taken into God's nature and will incur from this an inability to sin. Just as the "first immortality, which Adam lost by sinning, was the ability to avoid death; the final immortality will be the inability to die and in the same way, the first free will is the ability to avoid sin... (so with the final free will, man) will not be able to lose the will towards piety and justice" (Augustine 2003: 1089).

In addition to his superhuman physical and emotional attributes, the mental characteristics of the "God-man," incorporated into the divine that the resident of the City of God can expect to become, are synonymous with Augustine's depiction of the characteristics of time and of God Himself. Man will not merely heal his own animality but at the same time will surmount everything in existence that appears contradictory or opaque. Every kind of otherness, would end "our nature will be healed by immortality... and will have no perverted elements, and nothing at all, in ourselves or any other, will be in conflict with any of us" (Augustine 2003: 893). The God-man, as discussed is the case with God, will be able to see the essence of things

without recourse to their particular material bodies. Man will be able to see the "immaterial" with a power of sight "extraordinary in its potency" (Augustine 2003: 1084). He will be able to have an understanding of reality which is completely self-sufficing. He will enjoy a perfect "theoretical"—in the sense that it is not practical—understanding of the world that does not rely on any actual material experience because man will perceive concepts themselves rather than their imperfect manifestations (Augustine 2003: 1086). In the City of God man, through being incorporated into Him, will "drink at the very source of God's wisdom" this is because man will be able to see things beyond time and as such will be able to perceive how everything material relates to the idea in the mind of God from which it was copied. Man in the City of God will be able to see everything as it really is, being bound by no material constraints. The Saints will not need bodily eyes to see rather they will see through the "eyes of the heart" by "seeing" the God in all things (Augustine 2003: 1084). And in this respect while the Greek philosophers, Augustine writes, maintained that "intelligible things are seen by the mind's vision, and sensible things, that is, material things, are apprehended by the bodily senses, whereas the mind, they say cannot observe intelligible things by means of the body, nor material things, by its own unaided activity," man's abilities to "see" in the City of God will, expose this proposition to be a "sham" and as "ridiculous" (Augustine 2003: 1085). The mental attributes of the God-man will prove in other words that the spirit can perceive the material, that the otherness in man's physical experience is not simply something to be transcended but that it in fact can be "solved" because it doesn't ultimately exist. Respect for the autonomy of the object, its ability to surprise, will no longer be a factor for man, since the experience of it would be rendered incidental through revealing the actual underlying and unchanging essence of that object. "How complete, how lovely, how certain will be the knowledge of all things, a knowledge without error, entailing no toil" (Augustine 2003: 1076). As Eliade writes salvation, in this context, means "the highest freedom that man can imagine: freedom to intervene even in the ontological constitution of the universe" (Eliade 1959: 160).

In the City of God, then, man would no longer be bound by the material constraints of time or space, of any circumstance, but would rise above all. Quoting Paul Augustine writes that "now we see a puzzling reflection in a mirror; but then we shall see face to face... (because) God will be all in all" (Augustine 2003: 1083). The God-man will be able to see and experience time as it really exists, simultaneously, just as God sees it, and as such will understand how

everything that seemed evil in fact fit into God's plan for the world. He will consequently have a perfect understanding of history and of the operation and interaction of every event and substance in reality.²⁰³ And redeemed man will not be tempted by any of the material situations that he will have access to by virtue of his ability to exist in all times because he will see them in a new light just as a doctor can recognize diseases without contracting them (Augustine 2003: 1089). Thus man living through time, as it were, in the City of God will "live unchangeably" and will see the world as "unchangeable" (Augustine 2002: 158; *De Trinitate* 15, 14). He will no longer see them in their imperfection alone but only as they really are, in their most fulsome, true, sinless, and perfect form as part of God's overall plan.²⁰⁴

The self-identity of the personality of the God-man would, likewise, find completion in the City of God. This is because his "outer man," his material sensory self, would be permanently and wholly joined to his "inner man" his spiritual self akin to God. And as such the motives for the actions of each individual, hidden now from fallen man with his corrupted will, would become transparent to the subject and no longer hidden from others. The inner struggle and mystery that accompanies the life of earthly man as a result of his fall, would thus become a thing of the past as the God-man can expect to achieve a total control over every component of himself through his connection to God. Man would come to see in himself nothing that was changeable but only that which is fixed and absolutely true. In the same way, the thoughts of every individual, since they will be at one with God, will also become transparent to one another. Words will not be needed to convey ideas, because they contain an ambiguity that will be impossible in the City of God. People will instead think and communicate through some other means and in light of a perfect understanding of every element of existence such that God alone currently enjoys. And this will spur a complete unity of purpose among the God-men (Augustine 2003: 1089). The implication of this, as Deane indicates, is that true justice, among the chief pursuits of Classical philosophy, will only be found among the inhabitants of the City

²⁰³ As Augustine writes, at the end of history "it will become plain that God's judgements are perfectly just, not only all the judgements passed from the beginning, and all that are to be pronounced hereafter until that judgement day. At that day too, it will become evident by what just decision of God it comes about that at this present time so many, in fact almost all, of the just judgements of God are hidden from mortal perception and understanding" (Augustine 2003: 898).

²⁰⁴ The purpose and secret behind every riddle and paradox would likewise also be revealed, the incredible and contradictory things in human experience that defy explanation such as the burning of quicklime when it comes into contact with water, the hardness of diamonds, the magnetic properties of the loadstone, and, following an ancient belief, the supposed invulnerability of the salamander to fire (Augustine 2003: 969-972).

of God who, in their perfect and shared obedience to God, would always have a perfect understanding of what to do, when to do it, and of how to cooperate with one another to bring about shared aims (Deane 1963: 119-120).

Summary

In the eternal Sabbath of the seventh day that is the heavenly city God "will rest... and he will cause us... to find our rest in him" (Augustine 2003: 1091). At that moment man will not simply become a god among gods in the old polytheistic sense but instead will be taken into God Himself by possessing a nature capable of becoming divinized. There man "shall have leisure to be still, and we shall see that he is God, whereas we wished to be that ourselves when we fell away from him... Then we abandoned the true God, by whose creative help we should have become gods, but by participating in him, not by deserting him" (Augustine 2003: 1090). As we have reviewed, Augustine was driven to these drastic conclusions about reality and man's destiny and existence as a result of his attempt to reconcile the seemingly immaterial perfection of the concept and of other elements in man's experience that spoke to it, beauty, spirituality, the design or pattern that seems to underlie reality etc., with the degradation of the world. For Augustine man literally was the universe, his natural state, obfuscated by original sin because of his wilfulness, had been one of total harmony with the world, but his destiny was the complete literal absorption of the physical world into himself through becoming a "God-Man." All that remained for man to do in this conception was to endeavour to be totally obedient, the corrupted will could not be suppressed and so the choice to turn to God could not be made through human volition. Man's only refuge was the hope of receiving an undeserved grace. Again this metaphysical idea was concretized through Augustine's epistemology which stressed that things in the world only had a duration and so an existence through man's ability to perceive them by virtue of his connection to the divine mind.

The *City of God* is the promise of eternal perfection and oneness with all reality that awaits those who have proven themselves to have an uncompromising faith and love for God, while its earthly foil is fundamentally a transitory city created by the error engendered in man by

his primal fall in the Garden of Eden which is destined to be destroyed at Christ's return.²⁰⁵ And in so doing man's dehumanization, his loss of his own true self or nature, would finally be undone.²⁰⁶ In arguing for man's eventual union with the creative source of all reality Augustine was first and foremost responding to the profound existential turmoil in his own life. This set him on a search that passed through the best of what the ancient world had to offer in terms of philosophy and religion. He had found all wanting in their ability to provide a sure and certain path to something transcendent and certain, to obtain what his age had cried out for, a way for man to move beyond the limitations proscribed by the ontological circumstances in which human life was seen to be so firmly entrenched in the Greco-Roman worldview. Man's separation from otherness, his humanistic freedom or agency, for Augustine, became something pejorative and an aberration. Something assumed or taken as natural or self-evident in the prevailing culture, in other words, became the basis in Augustine's mind for what was itself taken to be unnatural and a problem in desperate need of a solution. And we can see from this that while Augustine was inescapably a man trying to react to the problems of his own time, the solutions that he posed to them were novel.

Anyone can retrospectively argue with relative ease, that developments in the larger society lead to Augustine's position. But when we place ourselves in Augustine's own shoes, when we attempt to look prospectively at his work with humility, from the vantage point of that which was around him, the positions that he adopted emerge as in no way self-evident. Augustine's theology was not in line with what his contemporaries were saying concerning the body and the will, and was, moreover, completely at odds with what man and his world were taken from time immemorial, and up until the diffusion of his own writings, to be.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ As Augustine would preach shortly after the fall of Rome: "So the days are evil. But let us be calm. What does that mean, "Let us be calm?" Let us not get angry at the divine judgment. Let us say to him, "*It is good for me that you have humbled me, that I may learn your justifications* (Ps 119:71). You thrust me out of paradise, you cast me forth from bliss. I am in distress, I am groaning with pain. *My groaning is not hidden from you* (Ps 38:9). but *it is good for me that you have humbled me, that I may learn your justifications*. In evil days I learn to look for good days." What are the good days? Don't look for them now. Believe me, or rather believe with me, you won't find them. The evil days will pass, and the good ones come. But they will come as good for the good, for the bad as even worse" (Augustine 1990: Vol. III/2, 85; Sermon 25, 5).

²⁰⁶ As Barrow writes, Augustine "read history differently. Men had too often taken false standards and had interpreted their private and public affairs in light of those false standards... History could be read aright only by the standards of Christian insight into values. Thus read, history gave no support to despair; sure confidence awaited those who had the eyes to see" (Barrow 1950: 260).

²⁰⁷ "Instead of the freedom of the will and humanity's original Royal dignity," as Pagels writes, "Augustine emphasizes the bondage of the will by depicting humanity as sick, suffering, and helpless, irreparably damaged by

Augustine's claims about original sin and man's consequent inability to come to God through his own efforts were not simply a development upon the views of others or a continuation of the "discourse" or overall system of thought in which Augustine operated. The triumph of Augustine's theology was a product of the striving of his age for certainty, yet his work was framed by, but not simply the product, of his cultural and intellectual milieu (Rist 1994: 11). When we look back at Augustine's writings in light of his society we can see, as I have tried to do, how they were directed at fulfilling a deep and abiding, personal, need, as perhaps most profusely expressed by Augustine through the angst of his *Confessions*.²⁰⁸ Augustine was able to move beyond, or rather reconstitute or profoundly revisit, the ontological presuppositions in which he was immersed by looking back to the story of Adam and Eve, to a historical event onto which all the difficulties evident in his own time and within his own mind could be projected, attributed, and so creatively re-imagined and "solved." While the myth of a problem free past is a theme as old as humanity itself, Augustine uniquely used it to develop a systematic program for human redemption. History provided Augustine with a space for effecting something truly different from that which had come before, by furnishing a place whose price of admission implicitly brought with it the capacity to move beyond the presuppositions of the present via subjectivity.

He realized that the Christian belief in a plan for history, when combined with God's omniscience, meant that error could not be inherent in the world, definitively breaking from the position on otherness of the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition. He also realized that this necessitated that man's experience of error could, because of the goodness of the world, only be attributable to man himself, rather than to God and his Creation. This provided the promise of sure deliverance to man at the same time that it set the mold for subsequent philosophies of history in the West which have posited that history is the working out of an inevitable error, the revealing of man's true nature which can only lead to perfection. In place of an eternal organism, the world could now appear as something made for a higher purpose. And the whole point of existence was thus taken into man's need for redemption. Since an omniscient God would have

the Fall... Astonishingly, Augustine's radical views prevailed, eclipsing for future generations of Western Christians the consensus of the first three centuries of the Christian religion" (Pagels 1995: 373).

²⁰⁸ At the pain of overdramatizing things his whole existence, as we have seen, embodied the struggle of Late Antiquity for something more than man. More than any of his contemporaries Augustine "stood in judgement" over the Classical world and thus took thought in a new direction that "left an indelible mark on subsequent Western thought" (Rist 1994: 1).

been aware of Adam's sin prior to his creation, God must have created him with a goal in mind, with the intention of improving humanity. Everything in existence was consequently created by God so as to facilitate man's eventual perfection, since he alone of reality possessed a will which could both stray and at the same time demonstrate an obedience worthy of being taken into God. History is thus completely synonymous with the cause of otherness and the working out of its solution. History is the use and misuse of the will in order to bring about the God-man.

Augustine revisited the teachings of the Church and developed a systematic program for understanding man's plight and for entertaining a hope of human redemption that did not just offer an ephemeral connection to a means of alleviating the otherness that overshadows man's actions but the promise of permanently solving it via incorporation into a perfect God. As we have seen this was through locating the source of man's problems not in the nature of his earthly existence but in his own actions, in his failure to understand "himself." And in placing the cause of otherness in man, Augustine essentially provided a means for man to entertain the belief and the expectation that he could, and was meant to, definitively solve his problems by reconciling himself to existence, rather than to simply move beyond it as his Neo-Platonist contemporaries posited. Through conforming his behaviour and worldview to a certain standard that offered the prospect of deliverance, and so healing his own defect, man could attain his true birthright by not just becoming more than the world but by acquiring a complete and perfect understanding of it. As Cochrane writes "to the Classical precept "remember to think of yourself as a mere man'... (Augustine) opposed the promise of deification for humanity" (Cochrane 1966: 411). This was a transformative agenda in every sense of the word. It centered on lifting man above the mundane through actually promising to heal his experience of the material world.

Augustine would detail his theology in a program that was so meticulous and all encompassing, so assured in its sense of purpose, so monumental in its scope and in what it claimed to offer, that it would not merely serve to influence, but would actually become the explicit basis of that which followed it. On a more practical level its great strength resided in the fact that it seemed to be able to answer or resolve, once and for all, the most fundamental problems of human experience namely: why bad things happen to good people, longstanding issues about the nature of time and intelligibility, the need to reconcile free will and determinism, and the question of what happens to us when we die and intertwined with this what is the meaning of our lives. Augustine's answers were plausible because they completely suited

the presuppositions of his time concerning the existence of a perfect divinity beyond man on Whom the world's evident order depended, and because they explained what was distinct about man *vis-à-vis* the rest of nature, i.e. his mind, his soul, and his apparent capacity to will. And in this it is important to recognize that Augustine was not some genius labouring in obscurity only to be recognized by later generations, he held the most prestigious of secular and religious offices that the Empire could bestow. He was a legend in his own time whose writings were immediately recognized for their importance and seized upon by those seeking a way out of Late Antiquity's aporias.²⁰⁹ He was the deepest exponent of the worldview that accompanied the rise of Christianity and his ideas provided the Church and Western Europe with a foundation on which to build in the face of an increasingly decentralized political system. He did not create the Middle Ages on his own, of course, but was nevertheless its central ideological progenitor.

Augustine's influence, then, would be exaggerated in ways that served to stifle knowledge. This prevented anything but derivative engagement with anyone other than Augustine and even with his own ideas by serving to obscure their basis (Rist 1994: 301). The prominent place that he occupied in libraries, the huge number of extant manuscripts of his work during the medieval period, of the *City of God* in particular despite its size, and the large number of apocryphal writings incorrectly attributed to him testify to his "universal authority" (Kristeller 1969: 358). While the Christians of Augustine's day had adopted his position to aid their desire to firmly ground their own hopes in their recently triumphant faith, as the Empire broke down and the Church became more a source of not just spiritual but also political and social control the City of God became more readily identified with its earthly counterpart; with the result that the book became the "Church Bible of the Middle Ages" (Oort 1991: 89). This long running period of direct influence on the Medieval world and the modern West that grew out of it would ensure that the ideas of this Berber North African Saint would come to pervade many of the presuppositions and assumptions about what human beings were capable of which succeeding ideological systems in the West have grown.²¹⁰ The Scholastic emphasis on grounding intellectual activity in revealed or certain truth, its relative intellectual impoverishment, when combined with the force of Augustine's argumentation and its

²⁰⁹ In Brown's words "by the time that Augustine laid down his pen, in 430, the leaders of the Christian Church already carried in the back of their minds a deposit of assumptions that marked them off invariably from the elites of the age of Plutarch, Galen, and Marcus Aurelius" (Brown 1988: 432).

²¹⁰ As Rist writes "in the more or less homogenous society in which Augustine's works lived for the first thousand years" the problem of his dominance would present "itself only on the margins of intellectual life" (Rist 1994: 301).

comprehensiveness, the power of his intellect and sheer persuasiveness, would mean that his views would come to be accepted as an intellectual orthodoxy, his comprehensive theory of history and reality taken uncritically as a certain article of faith in the theocentric climate of the Middle Ages. And consequently those that would follow Augustine because of his incredible period of influence would unbeknownst to themselves be caught in his web in that they would come to approach the world and have expectations about their own knowledge and behaviour which were directly derived from his theology.

I agree with Crisando, then, when he writes that "I doubt if any single person who is not a founder of a religious faith has had as much a hand in shaping a civilization as Augustine" (Crisando 2010: XIII).²¹¹ Regardless of how he would be used by his successors, Augustine was a profound thinker whose ideas address the most fundamental issues of human existence. He was not a villain bent on taking away the world's autonomy from man, but someone trying to bring a much needed sense of meaning and security to his contemporaries. But, the popularity of Augustine's writings would ensure that solving the problem of otherness, rather than merely bypassing, transcending, or reconciling oneself to reality's problems, became the preeminent ideological and theoretical preoccupation of those that followed him as well as the expectation of what a system of thought in the Western cultural context ought to be able to do. Surmounting, or reconciling oneself to, otherness would become *the problem* in Western thought, a fixation whose legacy this work also reflects. In tandem with this, of course, is the idea that otherness is ultimately an aberration from man's natural state and that man can enjoy, via his knowledge, a sort of objective and perfect correspondence with the world as it is that will ensure his perfection if only he can find himself.

Augustine's ideas ought to be seen in light both of this central preoccupation, that otherness is solvable, and tenet, that a failure of man is the cause of his own inability to solve it. As we have outlined in Augustine's theology above, these ideas work together as a piece each is implied and necessitated in every facet of his thought by his presuppositions regarding man and otherness. If otherness is an aberration from man's normal state then the end propounded by the system is in reality identical with the means to achieving it, obedience to the dictates of the already extant, but hitherto unrecognized, system itself, which alone possesses value. Nature

²¹¹ As Crisando writes again, "if the defining feature of the Middle Ages is its churches, the defining architect of its mind, heart and soul – at least until Aquinas – is St. Augustine" (Crisando 2010: IX).

thus also ultimately, through its unchanging naturalness, is also clearly taken to be a passive static thing without autonomy from God's designs. If otherness is not intrinsic to man's experience but the product of his own failure then there is also a part of man that is more real than the corrupted material reality with which his ordinary experience is presented. This is the same part of man which corresponds to his true nature and makes him the exceptional animal in creation. I am referring here of course to Augustine's notion of the will, that a part of man stands above circumstance, and therefore that man need not consider the context of his choice, by working within his ontology, but ought to idealistically consider himself to be above the world.

In sum, then, I contend that the approach to otherness championed by Augustine in the various tenets of his theology described above rely on conforming man to a certain standard and limiting his ability to engage with otherness. These presuppositions, I argue, have become ingrained in Western culture, they are "reified" latent features of our modern consciousness, whose bases in the transition from Classical Culture in Late Antiquity generally, and Augustine's ideas specifically, are generally not explicitly recognized. It is this which, as I will seek to demonstrate in the remainder of this work, is the influence of Augustine's fixation on remedying otherness, because it is an aberration, through subordination or obedience to a certain mode of existence which promises man and reality deliverance. I shall now turn to an investigation of Augustine's influence on the "father" of the Renaissance Francesco Petrarch. Petrarch in attempting to deal with the aporias of his own time, problems with which like Augustine he was obsessed, and which the medieval orthodoxy of the Church was unable to contend, would look back to the Classical world, and, like Augustine, to what he believed was the historical episode of man's fall from a Godlike dignity, projecting onto this space for difference his own view of man's intended nature. As we shall see, he would take Augustine not as an austere theologian but as a rhetorician and humanist, thereby revealing in his portrait of Augustine, with which we shall be especially concerned, his own definitive solution to the problem of otherness.

CHAPTER THREE: Petrarch

Just as the life of Augustine spanned and symbolized the transition from one perspective on the nature and meaning of human existence as it relates to externality to another, so Petrarch's life and work can rightly be said to embody a profound shift from the world that Augustine and his contemporaries had created to something wholly new and different. To his contemporaries he was the living embodiment of the humanist philosophy that he sought to tirelessly encourage. Over the course of his lifetime, he traveled widely across nearly all of Western Europe. He moved in the most prominent circles and lived in transformative times. And when he died in 1374, he left a world fundamentally altered by his presence, his life and thought, as he put it not long before his death, "was on the lips of learned men."²¹² Petrarch's thought was shaped by the breakdown of the conception of reality that Augustine and the theologians who followed him had built up over the preceding millennium. Some have rightly argued that Petrarch's humanism—not his humanitarianism but his emphasis on the study of humanity through ethics, philosophy, and history, as opposed to natural science—was presaged by earlier figures such as Lovato Lovati and Albertino Mussato, in that they used elements of Classical culture, namely poetry and tragedy, long before Petrarch had begun to write in ways unfamiliar to the Middle Ages (Witt 2000: 290). Yet as even the strongest proponent of this view, Ronald Witt, concedes, Petrarch "was the first to formulate a program and a goal for humanists" (Witt 2000: 81).²¹³ Petrarch's "goal" was not simply to make use of elements of classical culture for aesthetic or political purposes. It was the setting out of a comprehensive objective for man as he lives in a world that was intertwined with an inherited Christian notion of salvation. And these, when brought together by Petrarch from the various eddies and flows of earlier figures, combined to form a torrent that would eventually cascade over all of Europe and change the ages that would follow.

²¹² This line Petrarch borrows from the Late Antique author Macrobius. Petrarch, especially in the first half of his life, was a shameless self-promoter who was not above fabricating elements of his life to put his selfhood in the best possible light. Indeed, this very conscious construction of the self, as we shall see, was obviously at the heart of Petrarch's entire project.

²¹³ While scholarship has put an increasing emphasis on continuity between the Medieval and Renaissance periods, this in no way undermines the importance attributed by his contemporaries and by the later humanist movement to Petrarch's "rediscovery" of Classical learning and the self. As Trinkaus suggests, the origins of the cultural movement that embodied this shift, which nineteenth century scholars would term the Renaissance, were "multifarious and obscure," but its "basic character" and jumping off point can all be traced to the life and work of Petrarch (Trinkaus 1983: 11).

A Later Born Son of Rome

Petrarch's Italian heritage was central both to his self-identity and to the emergence of the Renaissance, the re-birth of Classical learning that his life would come to embody. During the Middle Ages the Ancient World had never died out in Italy to the extent that it had elsewhere in Western Europe. Italy retained a "persistent and idiosyncratic" tradition of its own in the arts, education, and legal customs that self-consciously modeled itself on its Roman precursors (Gillespie 2008: 71). Its geographic location allowed it to maintain political, and then economic, contact with the Byzantine Empire in a way that was impossible for the rest of Europe (Kristeller 1969: 555). Cities had also not simply vanished in Italy with the end of the Roman Empire as they had elsewhere, but, as was the case in ancient times, had retained their place at the center of social life. They were never "foreign elements" in an otherwise agrarian and feudal context, as was the case with their Northern counterparts. They retained healthy even if greatly diminished populations throughout the "Dark Ages" (Seigel 1968: 201). The strength of the cities reflected the prosperity that Italy garnered in the Early Middle Ages as a result of commercialization's growth in Western Europe from the outside inwards. It occurred first and foremost on the periphery, in Italy, because this region had maintained trade links with the East. And the increasing self-assertion that accompanied urban wealth fostered in the cities a sentiment that inevitably sought its models in the lost glories and achievements of the Roman past (Seigel 1968: 201).

Local patriotism led to an interest in biography written of both contemporary local notables and of the illustrious men of Rome to whom the ascendant cities now sought to connect and thereby legitimate themselves (Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 2, 334). The ruins, monuments, and documents of which Italy abounded, and the similarity of the Latin language to Italian all, in Burckhardt's words, "facilitated a return to the past" (Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 1, 179).²¹⁴ National and civic patriotism thereby became intertwined with the acquisition of a culture that more and more self-consciously strove to imitate the ancient world (Trinkaus 1983: 4). This interest in the classics was paralleled by the rise of the notaries in Northern Italy as a specialist class capable of filling the roles required by the expansion of commercial and civic administrations. Their

²¹⁴ It was easy then for Italians in search of an identity against the foreigners who continued to dominate them to look to "the universal empire of Rome" as "a permanent ideal" to emulate (Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 1, 151).

occupation necessitated a familiarity with Latin and the style of the classical authors, and as such they were undeniably the "direct ancestors of the humanists" (Seigel 1968: 212). Petrarch was descended from a long line of these notaries, men required to speak and write publicly who constituted the living link to the lettered and rhetorical tradition of antiquity.

Francesco Petrarch was born in the Tuscan city of Arezzo on July 20, 1304,²¹⁵ to Florentine exiles who, like Dante, had been on the losing side of civil strife in their native city (Wilkins 1963: 1).²¹⁶ In his early years, in a pattern that would characterize his later life, Petrarch's family, owing to their exile, frequently moved from one place to another seeking stability.²¹⁷ In 1312 his father, Pietro, in pursuit of employment, travelled to Avignon, near Marseilles. Avignon was attractive because it was a sort of "boomtown." It had been a fairly insignificant place until 1309 when Pope Clement V relocated the papacy there under pressure from the French cardinals and to escape the political turmoil plaguing Rome and the Papal States. After a year in Avignon, Pietro sent for his family and Petrarch moved to Provence. As housing was scarce in Avignon, the family lived in the neighbouring town of Carpentras in the shadow of Mount Ventoux, which Petrarch would famously climb later in life.

Petrarch's education was typical of a youth from a well-to-do family in the first decades of the fourteenth century. Like Augustine he exhibited, even at an early age, a precociousness and gift for study that, when combined with his prodigious memory, attracted the attention of his fellows.²¹⁸ At the age of twelve, after receiving a grammar school level education in Carpentras, Petrarch and his younger brother Gherardo moved to the town of Montpellier to follow in their father's footsteps by studying law at the university. Eletta, his mother, died in 1320, and her boys soon moved to attend the more distant and prominent University of Bologna. Petrarch and Gherardo would move back and forth between Bologna and Avignon over the next six years as conflicts between the civil authorities and the faculty and student body frequently disrupted their

²¹⁵ Medieval civilization reached its demographic and economic peak at about the time of Petrarch's birth. Urbanism, commerce, and the area under cultivation were all at their high, and perhaps even maximal, point, given the social and technological limitations of the time. Europe's population would not return to the level that it reached at about the year 1300 until the mid-seventeenth century.

²¹⁶ His father was named Pietro di Parenzo, Parenzo being the name of Petrarch's grandfather rather than a surname, and was commonly known as Petracco or Petrarcolo, a name that Francesco would one day Latinize and take as his own.

²¹⁷ Petrarch lived with his mother Eletta at the home of Petrarch's grandfather in Incisa, a town near Florence, and from 1311 in Pisa, while Pietro traveled around looking for work.

²¹⁸ As he would retrospectively write, in "early childhood, when everyone else was pouring over Prosper or Aesop, I brooded over Cicero's books, whether through natural instinct or the urgings of my father" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 600; *Rerum Senilium Libri XVI*, 1).

studies.²¹⁹ With Pietro's own death in 1326 the brothers were left with a substantial inheritance. Petrarch and Gherardo immediately quit their studies and returned to Avignon to live a fairly dissolute and foppish existence paid for by their father's wealth. This even included, as was not uncommon for rich young men of the time, the wearing of high heels and the use of curling irons (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 60; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* X, 3). Despite the pretentiousness of his lifestyle, even in this period, which Petrarch would later deem "lost," he continued to devote himself to the study of the classics.²²⁰ He expanded his private library, building on his first purchase in 1325, he significantly claimed whether falsely or not, of Augustine's *City of God* (Levi 2002: 81).²²¹

By 1330, his father's money having run out, the easy life in Avignon had come to an end. Petrarch alludes to the possibility that this was because of pilfering by the servants or the guardians of the estate. Petrarch's financial distress essentially forced him to become an adult and to seek an occupation of his own. He had acquired by this point an immense hatred of the law viewing his legal training as time "wasted," perhaps because he felt that he had been compelled to undertake it by his father or possibly because of the legal manipulations of those who had taken much of his inheritance (Petrarch 2010 Vol. 2, 600; *Rerum Senilium Libri* XVI, 1). Consequently, he opted to take minor orders and briefly studied theology at the University of Paris. Either at Paris or at Avignon in 1333, Petrarch became acquainted with the illustrious Augustinian monk Dionigi di Borgo San Sepolcro (Gill 2005: 99-100). Dionigi became Petrarch's spiritual advisor with the aim of turning his mind toward higher things and provided him with a pocket copy of Augustine's *Confessions*, which he would thereafter always carry with him, most notably on his ascent of Mount Ventoux (Wilkins 1963: 10).

Petrarch had by this time gained a number of prominent friends in the large Italian community in Avignon, most important of whom was Giacomo Colonna, a member of a noble Roman family who would obtain an appointment for him to the staff of his brother, the powerful

²¹⁹ At Bologna Petrarch notably befriended the great medieval scholar of Augustine Bartolemo da Urbino, who had composed a massive gloss of Augustine's body of work consisting of 15,000 entries (Gill 2005: 10).

²²⁰ Our source of information for this period in his life is of course Petrarch himself. As we shall see with the ascent of Mount Ventoux, he would at times retrospectively change his life story to suit his humanist project, to make his path to his own version of redemption appear more interesting and inevitable.

²²¹ For all the hatred of Avignon that he would later profess, the city was at the "intellectual crossroads" of Europe and so was the ideal place for him to reside at this formative period in his life because it provided ready access to a range of manuscripts and to a knowledge of the ancient world that would have been unavailable elsewhere (Witt 2000: 231).

Cardinal Giovanni. This, along with the canonries that Giovanni would bestow on him—ecclesiastical prebends tied to geographic areas in which residence was not a requirement—provided Petrarch with ample financial support and leisure to devote to a self-examination of his own life and to the sense of moral and intellectual purpose that he had begun to intensely feel. Petrarch, always a gregarious man, was developing an enormous hunger to earn lasting fame of the sort enjoyed by the Classical figures about whom he read so keenly. He began to feel that the study of the Classical world had more to offer than simply high culture, that it could provide a solution to the sense of purposelessness and degeneracy that he felt acutely among both himself and his contemporaries. He grew disillusioned with his own age, as Trinkaus suggests, because of "its lack of depth of Christian commitment, its morally and spiritually ruinous materialism, its need for a sense of historical direction, its emotional volatility, its shallow and short-sighted vanity, and its intense personal and religious despair" (Trinkaus 1983: 353).

Petrarch had very little confidence in the ability of the medieval secular and ecclesiastical establishments to solve the problems of his time. Moreover, although a devout Christian, Petrarch came to see the Medieval approach to the world and to knowledge as a lapse from true Christianity and from true wisdom, one that was brought on by the dehumanization of Europe engendered by the fall of Rome to the barbarians.²²² This would be Petrarch's response to the Medieval worldview's apparent paralysis, its "hardening," as Blumenberg writes, "from what is human" (Blumenberg 1985: 177), one that Petrarch saw as responsible for everything in his own time that seemed to draw men away from what he took to be genuine human activity.

Petrarch would plunge himself into the past, as he puts it, to "sing the glories of the men of old" (Petrarch 1977: 232), not just as a means of carrying out his humanist agenda but also, as was the case for Augustine, for the purpose of a creative personal escape from a sense of intense dissatisfaction with his own life. He summed up his feelings about the ancient world and the past shortly before his death in saying that he had always "dwelt single-mindedly on learning about antiquity, among other things because this age has always displeased me, so that, unless love for my dear ones pulled me the other way, I always wished to have been born in any other age whatever, and to forget this one, seeming always to graft myself in my mind onto other ages" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 673; *Rerum Senilum Libri XVIII*, 1). Petrarch sensed something Godlike

²²² As Trinkaus writes, "where Augustine gave new life to a tired and formalized rhetorical tradition," Petrarch "turned to the classics for a freshness and beauty and human relevance that the highly organized and practice-oriented Christian culture of the late Middle Ages lacked" (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 20).

in the attitude toward existence and in the measure of immortality evidently achieved by the ancient figures after whom he had begun to pattern himself. He would come to believe, through studying the past, that the true image of God in the actions of man was a transhistorical constant that he identified with ancient *autarkei* or self-rule. This discovery would eventually launch the Renaissance and take the form of a massive valorization of the self and individuality, of the wilful creative self, as the part of man that was eternal and real, that mirrored the divine, rather than that which was responsible for man's separation from Him, as Augustine had posited.

The Problem of Dynamism in the High Middle Ages

The fourteenth century was a time of profound questioning and doubt about man's place in the world. As we reviewed, Late Antiquity endeavoured to respond to similar questions, and as such both periods can be seen as "zones of transition and new formation" in thought. As Blumenberg argues, "the end of the ancient world seems to be just as capable of interpretation by means of this category as is the crisis of the Middle Ages" (Blumenberg 1985: 147). Augustine's theology had made available to Christians the prospect of a total reconciliation with all aspects of the universe beside which Hegel's idea of Reason and the Absolute pales in comparison, and this explains its endurance and the trauma surrounding its end. The world had been created for man in this conception as a path to God and had to be used accordingly as a means to an end to that purpose. Likewise, nature lacked an ultimate autonomy from man because it was beneath him; man was more real and alive because he alone of living creatures was connected to the divine mind, which was its basis, and because man could exercise, albeit always incorrectly since Adam, a Godlike will. Although God was not exactly predictable he was nonetheless rational, and man could take comfort in knowing that his own mind was linked to God's. There was nothing in nature that God could create or do that was ultimately beyond man or his understanding. This was because God patterned everything in creation after His own mind, a mind which He shared with man. The totality that Augustine's theology promised to the faithful, then, was a powerful and reassuring resolution to man's anxieties about the world, but was conditional—because it depended on obedience—on an attitude that "involved a renunciation of human activity" (Whitfield 1966: 71). It offered everything, the total seamless blending of subject and object via God, but also demanded everything in return. This notion of a God who

delivers grace and who demands total obedience, who needs to be worshipped because He alone is real—while greatly elaborated on by the multitude of theologians that followed in Augustine's wake—was nevertheless not restricted to theology. It was diffused by the power of the Church into every nook and cranny of medieval civilization, touching every facet of life and thought from commoner to King, from Pope to pauper.²²³ This was a world in which the soul and grace, damnation and deliverance, were on the minds of high and low alike, in which actions were measured and minutely dissected to evaluate their worth in the eyes of God because the entirety of existence was thought to be inextricably combined together in an integrated cosmos.

Augustine's theology, when elucidated to its most fulsome extent, operated like the mechanism of a finely made watch, each gear turned another and served to accomplish its overall purpose in a harmonious and rational totality, winding down and designed for the sole purpose of bringing man to God. This was an image of reality in which all was joined together in a Great Chain of Being. And upholding man's confidence in this rational structure of the world, as Blumenberg writes again, was the central effort of the Christian establishment "all the way from Augustine to the height of Scholasticism" (Blumenberg 1985: 130). Augustine's system began to unravel because the reconciliation that it promised ran up against its most fundamental contradiction, which its view of existence as a harmonious totality was not prepared to accommodate. This contradiction became a pressing intellectual concern at the time that it also came to be reflected in the daily realities of life in the High Middle Ages. Improved contact with the Arab world had also led to the rediscovery of Aristotle and his rationalist, as opposed to faith based, investigatory program for knowledge. Altogether, man's life had become less orderly and predictable than it had been in the subsistence economy that had mostly characterized the earlier period. As man had again begun to live in a world that was increasingly and very visibly one of his own creation, it became harder and harder to reconcile this with the image of reality that Augustine had constructed. This conflict took the form of concerns over how God's omnipotence, the essential divine attribute in Augustine's reconciliation, could be reconciled with man's increasingly secular, disparate, and often even meaningless actions (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 22). The idea of binding God's rationality to these activities was repugnant to many, as

²²³ As Kristeller writes, Augustine's thought not only "dominated political and historical literature," but was diffused throughout the entire culture during the middle ages, because Church and State alike, jettisoning his hesitancy to attribute divinity to any human institution, used his theology as their respective sources of legitimacy (Kristeller 1969: 357).

was equating all of man's actions with original sin. This led then to a growing desire for a more personal connection to God, for a charismatic "original Christianity" compatible with the growing sense of agency that men felt within themselves and in others (Gillespie 2008: 20).

In Scholastic theology before its major crisis concerning the position of man and omnipotence in the thirteenth century, and when it was still in its earliest form and basically exclusively under the influence of Augustine, God was for all intents and purposes bound by His creation. The world as the Scholastics envisioned it operated in a way analogous to Augustine's epistemology, and so God's will was effectively excluded from interference in His creation by transgressing the rules of rationality that men's minds were presumed to share. But God's will, as became evident, was dependent on His ability not to will, and in the same way the man whose will was modelled on that of God's also necessarily lacked agency if even God Himself was bound by what He had created. It came to be seen that the choices that man and God alike made were irrelevant if choice was foreclosed because predestination always obliged the actor to do only one thing. Without real choice on the part of man or God, the problem also arose of who becomes responsible for evil. In the absence of man's ability to genuinely exercise a will, through having a real choice, God was only absolved from being the cause of evil by way of a technicality and so, by His implication in imperfection. He could not offer the security of the perfection needed to assure the omnipotence on which the system relied. And by the same token, if all being was brought into an eternal time—as was Augustine's view since the redemption of man was foreordained from the beginning of time—the course of an individual's actual life could bear no influence on what happens in time even if his existence makes it possible; his life is just a "going through the motions" of what is foreordained even if his actions serve to bring about the ultimate conclusion.²²⁴ Such a will is then completely naturalistic and passive in the sense of its ability to actually affect externality or have any kind of relationship to it beyond that of one cog to another. The view of man's life that this gives rise to, since he can essentially do nothing in it other than live in a way akin to a mechanism, is one of killing time, and this too led to a relativistic, nihilistic, and amoral approach to life.²²⁵

²²⁴ As Blumenberg writes "if human nature was destined from eternity to be united with divine nature, human history becomes irrelevant to the divine act of will, and the act of grace becomes a mere side effect of an event that would have been in order even without man's need for redemption" (Blumenberg 1985: 174).

²²⁵ God's obligation to create the world because of his commitment to man's ultimate salvation by virtue of their shared nature also raised the problem of how this could be reconciled with genuinely creative activity. Like the old Platonic demiurge, if God had no choice but to bring existence into creation, then the question emerged of how the

The Scholastic God that dominated the Middle Ages could thus ultimately not accommodate the omnipotence of a God in complete control of His own creation. The reconciliation that Augustine offered via predestination and the material "universals" in which man could partake were the key components of his entire system (Blumenberg 1985: 138). But, since God's omnipotence necessitated His total control of reality at all times, the idea of Him operating from foresight and according to universal rules, even if in His own mind, became impractical and unnecessary. Instead, God had to possess the ability to intervene in existence whenever and wherever he wished. But the doctors of theology in Paris, men like Bonaventure, needed to resolve the dilemmas raised by the need to reconcile the existence of universals with God's omnipotence (Levi 2002: 46). As a result, they fell back increasingly on emphasizing man's insignificance in comparison to God's, making him incidental in the sense of delegitimizing any actions that exceeded the bounds of their increasingly restrictive theology, those that were determined not to be acts of humility before an all-powerful Deity. The result of this in the context of Augustine was a disinterest in his inner spiritual struggle in the medieval period, as exhibited in the *Confessions* and as would be essential to Petrarch, in favour of his creation of an "objective theological structure and an ecclesiastical programme" as typified by the great German scholastic Albertus Magnus (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 19).

But in reality the synthesis between man's actions and an omnipotent God were antithetical to Monotheistic Christianity, and by the middle of the thirteenth century Scholasticism was desperately trying to find a means of escaping from its own contradictions through providing God with omnipotence while yet maintaining his connection to man's rationality, as was required for Augustine's vision of salvation. "It seemed necessary to assume the deity's absolute power to act without being limited by feeble human perception and conceptions of the natural or the divine" (Trinkaus 1979: 115). Scholasticism's critics were of the view that God's omnipotence, as needed for him to provide a reliable and certain path to definitively solving otherness for man, could only come through undermining all the aspects of what he offered to man as components of his ultimate salvation, i.e. universals, a shared nature, predestination, and grace. In cutting out man in favour of an omnipotent God, Scholasticism was unable to explain his relationship to the world and visa versa, and the Christian God could

creation of the world could have resulted from a genuinely creative act by an agent with a purpose and volition, as would seem necessary to explain the creation of something from nothing.

thereby only be taken as omnipotent if he "abandoned" man and nature to their own chaotic devices.²²⁶

Ockhamism took all the contradictions inherent in Scholasticism to their logical conclusion.²²⁷ The crux of the issue for Ockham resided in the fact that if God had created the world in the way that Augustine had described, so that everything worked together harmoniously to bring man toward salvation, then nothing could be removed from His creation without making the finely tuned mechanism of existence itself inoperable.²²⁸ Yet such a view of the world and time seemed incommensurate with true omnipotence, and, as indicated, God could not deliver salvation from otherness without omnipotence. The possession of a Sovereign will necessitated the existence of a Godlike ability to make or not make existence, or to interfere in it to upset His plans for salvation if He chose to do so. Ockham argued that God's actions were only restricted by His inability to contradict Himself, since He was divine, and that it was the height of foolishness to portray God as bound by anything in human rationality.²²⁹ But if man did not have a rationality or nature like God, then he could not hope to reconcile himself to otherness since the world, in such a conception, becomes by necessity always potentially random and not orderly, as far as man was concerned. Ockham's Nominalism thus precluded Augustine's notion of universals as underpinning both man's mind and existence. And as an alternative the opponents of scholasticism emphasized that man had to simply use his reason, as exemplified by the materialism of Roger Bacon, to try and provisionally understand an inherently unknowable world.

²²⁶ The notion of a planned world, one possible reality, was the crux of the operation of the whole Augustinian mechanism and its demise raised many troubling possibilities. Hencerforth, men would see themselves as living in a changeable world prone to alteration where many conceivable paths were possible. As Blumenberg writes "the Middle Ages came to an end when within their spiritual system creation as 'providence' ceased to be credible to man" (Blumenberg 1985: 138).

²²⁷ Ockham claimed that God could produce ideas without an object—an object without an idea, objects that had no existence—and could even, in contrast to Augustine's theology, make people not responsible for their own actions (Blumenberg 1985: 188-196).

²²⁸ This rendered "the whole Scholastic metaphysics of the soul" to "a mere fable, a fiction that cannot be substantiated by any facts" (Cassirer 2010: 9). It reduces nature "to an order imported to it by man" and as such gives him no "access to the contents of the order chosen" (Blumenberg 1985: 154). Importantly, it also substitutes the ability to logically prove God via the existence of universals, as had been the staple of Neo-Platonic and Christian philosophy for over a thousand years, for a simple, personal, act of faith. This view also emphasizes man's ability to will, albeit not in a divine way which shares its nature with God.

²²⁹ Importantly, if there were no universals, this also meant that man did not have a rationality like God, or a nature worthy of being saved by God, since man as the universal type, "one" in Adam, could not exist. This denial of a universal type of man worthy by nature of being saved raised all sorts of anxieties about the existence of an eternal soul in man (Levi 2002: 34).

With this view, then, man was simply thrust onto his ability to will, albeit not in a divine way that shares its nature with God.²³⁰ Without a connection to God or externality, all that was left for man to do was to live in a world from whose workings he was completely cut off (Gillespie 2008: 27). Nothing that man did could be shown to ultimately be better than anything else, not just because there was nothing Godlike in man's actions, but also because such an epistemology eliminated the notion of a hierarchy of reality or morality underpinning man's actions (Trinkaus 1983: 8).²³¹ This is simply because the world is envisioned as under the control of a God who can simply do as he likes given that he cannot be bound by any inherent nature. As opposed to what Augustine had suggested, therefore, the implications of God's omnipotence when fully developed were ultimately found to preclude the ability of man to reconcile himself to a nature controlled by God or to higher spiritual values. The failure of Augustine's solution meant that man found himself in a state of uncertainty because of his inability to accommodate nature owing to his putting total faith in an omnipotence doomed by its very nature to leave him behind. The supreme contradiction in the reconciliation that the medieval worldview offered, and thus the result of its breakdown, was the subject-object divide. Subject and object seemed incapable of having any relationship to one another at all, and it was confusion over their very existence as disparate things yet evidently with some kind of relationship, as borne out by man's activities in the world and nature's ability to act on man, that was put into starkest relief by "the 'nihilistic' crisis" in late medieval thought (Gillespie 2008: 14).²³²

Man thus had to be cut out, reduced, made incidental to his participation in the world, if the omnipotence of God were to deliver a solution to otherness. Man could no longer be the God-man, and omnipotence was closed off to him as was his ability to influence nature. Man thereby found himself alone in the world, separated from God, and immersed in a hostile reality to which he could have no real connection. "Nothing less than the loss of this location of man in

²³⁰ This combined with the denial of universals, and so of a shared nature, meant for Ockham that God in the Incarnation could have just as easily become a stone, a tree, or a donkey as a man. This meant that "not only could the world no longer be created for man's benefit, but even God's becoming man could no longer refer exclusively to man" (Blumenberg 1985: 174).

²³¹ "All intellectual activities and theories (are reduced) to the same level" (Trinkaus 1983: 8).

²³² Even Thomas Aquinas' eventual resolution of these difficulties, at least according to the Roman Catholic Church, were condemned during this period, in 1277 by Étienne Tempier the Bishop of Paris, and did not become Church dogma until the 16th century because viewed as an unacceptable "philosophical restriction of divine omnipotence" (Blumenberg 1985: 160)

the theological system of reference had come about during the decline of the Middle Ages: the speculative self-renunciation of 'anthropological 'egoism'" (Blumenberg 1985: 177). And this is key point that I am trying to draw out here. I cannot hope to do justice to scholasticism in the brief discussion above but I can argue, by focusing on its relationship of the subject to otherness, was that the problem of the era, as triggered by the desire to keep the system of salvation inherited from Augustine and obtained from omnipotence operating at all costs, was the position of man in the world. This is in regard to whether human activity was simply autonomous and self-contained, and therefore quite meaningless and relativistic, and what the nature of man's relationship was to an objective world that seemed to be inextricably beyond him by virtue of his autonomy from an omnipotent God. The price of omnipotence was that man had to be left to his own devices, with the result that "humans could find no point of certainty or serenity" in the world (Gillespie 2008: 25).

Thus, man's autonomous self and his relationship to a seemingly unknowable nature, or otherness, and God, was the problem that Petrarch confronted, but he would do this with all the expectations about man's divinity and ability to find ultimate certainty inherited from Augustine who, as he writes of him in the *Secretum* through the voice of a personified Truth, was "more dear to me than a thousand others" (Petrarch 2011: 7). He would draw on Augustine, but not the Augustine who emerged from the discussion in the previous chapter, but one who suited the dilemmas of Petrarch's own time. As we shall see, Augustine's emphasis on the will would be reinterpreted by Petrarch in an absolutely positive way. Divine providence would similarly become something aligned to man's actions, and the basis of what made man eligible for salvation via grace would thus be completely transformed from passive obedience into wilful action. As Trinkaus suggests in Petrarch's moral philosophy, "divine purpose and human motivations could function side by side, and they could be reconciled as men of many sorts moved by their own powers toward a more self-consciously moral and noble existence" (Trinkaus 1979: 134).

Petrarch re-examined Augustine's writings in a way designed to offer a solution to the inability of his contemporaries to account for the self or to accommodate the randomness of the world and the dynamism of man and nature. He did this in order to allow them to overcome the negative moral effects that he saw as arising from this seeming crisis of purpose. And thus Petrarch's lifelong ambition, the meaning he would hold for his contemporaries, was of a man

who embodied the search for "a new mode of reconciling heaven and earth, God and man" (Trinkaus 1979: 114). And he was well aware of the theological debates of the age because of his acquaintances and because when he attended the University of Bologna it taught both nominalism and Aristotelianism (Kristeller 1965: Vol. 2, 117).²³³ Petrarch would not simply react to Nominalism or to Scholasticism, both of which he hated passionately.²³⁴ He never set out to systematically critique their doctrines, but rather responded to their theological crisis by adopting their problematic. He and the humanist movement "bypassed" these Medieval theological problems, as Levi writes, through "a series of intellectual and imaginative expedients," which paid no mind to the "organized debates, the spiritual and liturgical practices, and the formally imposed scholastic categories of Western Christendom" (Levi 2002: 2). Petrarch and his humanist followers would argue that knowledge did not exist in some abstract and impersonal sphere of certainty and were horrified by the association of human nature with materiality rather than with man's innate freedom. They cared little for metaphysics and instead would wholly concern themselves with what they took to be man's Godlike individuality (Kristeller and Randall 1969: 11).

Virtue and the Self

The question for Petrarch was "how would it be possible to find a ground for identity in a world in which God, man, and nature were all in motion, all incomprehensible, and all at war

²³³ The Aristotelians, Petrarch charges, through their focus on the material merely cement man's base dependence on an unknowable chaos. And their naturalistic focus is not just a waste of time but amounts to a dehumanization. By drawing man away from the creative freedom that is his true nature, a focus on the material renders man, as he writes in the *Africa*, "only shades, light dust or wisps of smoke tossed by the wind" (Petrarch 1977: 34). Petrarch maintains that Scholastic theology's reliance on reason has served to remove man from God and for this reason he characterizes its adherents as a "crazy and clamorous set" (Petrarch 1969: 108) who "do not dare to write anything of their own" (Petrarch 1969: 108). What purpose does it serve, Petrarch rhetorically asks, to know "how many hairs there are in the lion's mane... that elephant's couple from behind and are pregnant for two years... that the sea urchin stops a ship... how the hunter fools a tiger with a mirror... that moles are blind and bees deaf... And even if they were true, they would not contribute anything whatsoever to the blessed life. What is the use - I beseech you - of knowing the nature of quadrupeds, fowls, fishes, and serpents and not knowing or even neglecting man's nature, the purpose for which we were born, and where and whereto we travel" (Petrarch 1969: 57-58).

²³⁴ As Petrarch would write of the kind of learning that Augustine's theology would eventually engender among the Scholastics, in a treatise entitled *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* or in the English *On the Author's Own Ignorance and that of Many Others*, "How infinitely small, I beseech you, is the greatest amount of knowledge granted to one single mind! Indeed, what a man knows, whosoever he may be, is nothing when compared - I will not say with God's knowledge - but with his own ignorance" (Petrarch 1969: 66). He writes instead that it should be plain to anyone living in the midst of the crises and controversies of the fourteenth century "that man cannot know everything, not even many things" (Petrarch 1969: 126).

with one another" (Gillespie 2008: 45). Petrarch like many of his contemporaries looked at the material world that God's omnipotence necessitated as a sort of chaos. He came to the conclusion that it appeared to man to be this way because his mind was, unlike that of God's, finite and imperfect. The world could never be known as it was, as the Scholastics had promised, because there was no permanence or stability in man's conceptions, as far as man was concerned. God could do as he liked because he was God. But Petrarch's faith in God's inherent goodness also forced him to repudiate the plurality of worlds hypothesis of the nominalists that denied providence (Cassirer 2010: 189). Petrarch kept faith with the salvation promised to man in the Christian faith and maintained that the world's undeniable chaos was a means of bringing it to a higher perfection (Kristeller 1965: Vol. 2, 59).

Petrarch's "solution" to the aporias of his own time, which he arrived at through revisiting ancient literature, was to accept the problem that the Middle Ages had confronted—man's separation from the world—by making it the basis of his own philosophy of human redemption. Petrarch came to see the world of fortune, the material world—in its transitoriness and seeming existence even beyond God's grace or mercy—as a sort of illusion (Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 2, 474). However, this was a chaos, because only an illusion, that, as opposed to what was the case in ancient moral philosophy, did not simply have to be accepted (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 46). The role of the soul was not simply to compose itself and so be resilient in its own self-sufficiency, thereby reaffirming one's own existence or self-identity to find comfort in a chaotic world. Such a view was no longer possible in the Middle Ages due to the expectations placed on man by a thousand years of Christian anthropology through Augustine's image of a definitive reconciliation. In Blumenberg's words, "The pressure of putting in question had penetrated too deeply into the makeup of self-consciousness and man's relation to the world. The more indifferent and ruthless nature seemed to be with respect to man, the less it could be a matter of indifference to him" (Blumenberg 1985: 182).

Petrarch looked, instead, at the chaos around him and at God's promise and what he took to be man's divine nature, he looked carefully at antiquity and the examples of a transhistorical human nature that he believed it provided, and came to the conclusion that all that was Godlike on earth was man's action itself. He called this emphasis on a free and unimpeded self "virtue" and saw it as inevitably modeled on God's own existence beyond an ephemeral materiality, and as such as, the only thing that was "real" on Earth (Petrarch 2009: Vol. 1, 10; *Rerum Senilium*

Libri I, 3). And in its ability not to be constrained by the world. Petrarch even maintained that it resembled, or was akin to, the eternity evidently possessed by a perfect God and so would survive death. Virtue for Petrarch, therefore, was the self's capacity to live differently. As Petrarch would write towards the end of his life in his poem the *Triumph of Eternity*, "since I saw nothing under heaven that was secure and stable, I turned then to myself in deep dismay and asked, 'What do you trust in?'... I thought and thought, and, as my mind reached deeper into itself, I saw a world appear, new in immobile and eternal time... What wonder did I feel when I saw stay in one sole movement what has never stopped, but courses on in total transformation" (Petrarch 2010(2): 154; *Triumph of Eternity*, 1-3... 19-21... 25-27).

Petrarch therefore found "an island of stability and hope," in an uncertain world, in his own individuality (Gillespie 2008: 46). He attempted to cope with the end of the Augustinian reconciliation, and the consequent sense of fragmentation in the self because of its newfound distance from the world, by developing "a new ethical program, a new philosophy" that envisioned the self as "not a given presence but a state of mind... which we need to attain through constant cultivation and care" (Zak 2010: 10). He looked again at the Augustinian emphasis on simple volition, as opposed to a reason aligned to the divine, and found this to be the true embodiment of the self. God had created man in His own image by endowing him alone of all living creatures with a will set above the world which mirrored His own. But this will was not something deficient or negative because misdirected, as it had been for Augustine, but instead possessed an inherent divinity that it could not lose. Man's will was creative; it mirrored the creative activity of God, and as such, it was capable of freely choosing its own actions. This volition meant that man possessed, alone of all the creatures in existence, an individuality in the sense that he could behave in a way that differed from what was ordained by natural impulse because he could choose to live a singular life unique from that of other men. And in this way it was in man's malleability rather than in his obedience, his freedom of action and thought, that Petrarch believed the self was akin to God (Cassirer 2010: 129). And so in Petrarch's mind, when man forgets his self, when he abandons his humanity, he becomes like an animal with human powers. So long as man "remembers he is a man," Petrarch maintained, "no animal is nobler," but "when he forgets that, nothing is more vile and more base, nothing worse than the man driven by his impulses" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 9; *Rerum Familiarium Libri IX*,4). In this conception a person who commits to virtue through emphasizing self-reliance and self-

containment is by implication "a superior and more truly human person" (Diekstra 1968: 61). As we shall see, for Petrarch, autonomy from the world would become synonymous with the very alienation from it with which Medieval theology was unable to contend. It would be in man's inability to contend with a hostile nature that the source of a divine individuality would be deemed to reside (Trinkaus 1979: 124).

The chaos of materiality was not simply a means of testing man's obedience to God, as Augustine had argued, but was rather its opposite, a forum for man to express his own will by being steadfast and unflinchingly committed to his own creative self, to the immaterial, in the face of fortune and material temptation. And in so doing, Petrarch believed that man could become Godlike and so achieve eternity. Such a conception of reality actually implies that God's will is itself mobilized through, and thereby becomes a partner in, man's activity (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 47). Grace was obtained not through the miraculous intervention of the Deity but as the result of "an intellectual exercise" that allowed man to align himself to God (Trinkaus 1983: 439). In this way, for Petrarch, as was the case with Augustine, "man was at the center and the heart of the world process" because God's providence, His control of events, existed to enable man to have opportunities to exercise his will, and as such His providential control and man's will were actually united into one cosmic and eternal act (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 4).²³⁵

This whole mindset is encapsulated in Petrarch's climbing of Mount Ventoux, an act that many, going back to Burckhardt, symbolically date as the beginning of the Renaissance. As indicated, Petrarch had grown up in the shadow of the mountain located just outside of the town of Carpentras near Avignon.²³⁶ He always claimed to have been the first since antiquity to climb Mount Ventoux, although we know today that the Medieval philosopher Jean Burdian had actually beaten him to the summit in 1316. But whether he was first to attempt it or not, any act of mountaineering in the first half of the fourteenth century was highly noteworthy. Mountain climbing purely for the sake of personal enjoyment or satisfaction was rare but not exceptional in the ancient world; Hadrian apparently ascended to the summit of Mount Etna, for instance. However, in the Middle Ages, this kind of activity was much less common and perhaps perceived to be pointless. The mountains were the mysterious, even potentially evil, domain of shepherds and their flocks, and nature and subjective experience were not something to be had or

²³⁵ Man exists, then, "to serve the spirit and let it not its proper place forsake" (Petrarch 1977: 18).

²³⁶ He claimed that the ascent was inspired by Livy's account of Philip of Macedon's climb to the summit of Mt. Hermo (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 172; *Rerum Familiarium Libri IV*, 1).

enjoyed for their own sakes, but only in light of what could further the intentions of an Almighty God.

Petrarch relates that he departed on his mountain trek with his brother, Gherardo, and two servants on the morning of April 26, 1336. The party, in a clearing slightly up the mountain, soon met an old shepherd who advised them to turn back, stating that he had himself attempted the ascent as a youth and only been rewarded with injury and frustration. The climb nonetheless continued, of course, and Petrarch soon parted ways with the rest of his company, proceeding by what he took to be an easier path. But what had seemed initially to be an easy way to the summit soon proved treacherous with all sorts of grievous hidden obstacles, and Petrarch relates that part of the way up he collapsed in a sort of crevice and, in exhaustion, meditated on the fragility of the human body. Finally, after much exertion, he reached the summit and found that the rest of the company had already beaten him there with comparative ease.²³⁷

The event of critical importance in the development of humanism and in the formation of Petrarch's outlook allegedly took place on the summit itself. As Petrarch writes in an essential passage, on reaching the top he was,

"somehow forgetful of the place to which I had come and why, until, after laying aside my cares as more suitable to another place, I looked around and saw what I had come to see... the mountains of the province of Lyons could be seen very clearly to the right, and to the left the sea at Marseilles... The shore itself was beneath my eyes. While I was admiring such things, at times thinking about earthly things and at times, following the example of my body, raising my mind to loftier things, it occurred to me to look into the Book of Confessions of St. Augustine... May God be my witness, and my very brother, that my eyes happened to light where it was written: 'And they go to admire the summits of mountains and the vast billows of the sea and the broadest rivers and the expanses of the ocean and the revolutions of the stars and they overlook

²³⁷ It should be noted here that the respective ascents of the two brothers to the summit—Gherardo, without great difficulty by taking the path that looked more treacherous, and Petrarch, with considerable hardship through choosing one that looked easy—is clearly a juxtaposition of the ability of some to ascend to God through simple faith and piety while others can only do so through the harder path of molding the self through the active pursuit of virtue. As Petrarch writes, comparing the climb to the search for God, "the life we call blessed is certainly located on high, and, as it is said, a very narrow road leads to it. Many hills also intervene and one must proceed from virtue to virtue with very deliberate steps. At the summit lies the end of all things and the limit of the path to which our travelling is directed... What detains you? Certainly nothing except the... less impeded road of earthly and base pleasures" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 175; *Rerum Familiarium Libri IV*,1).

themselves.' I confess that I was astonished... I closed the book enraged with myself because I was even then admiring earthly things after having been long taught by pagan philosophers that I ought to consider nothing wonderful except the human mind compared to whose greatness nothing is great" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 177; *Rerum Familiarium Libri IV*,1).

Petrarch's experience on the mountain apparently convinced him, in a way analogous to Augustine's conversion experience reading Paul in the garden, that he had found the solution that he had been looking for, the key after which he and his contemporaries had been blindly groping (Levi 2002: 84). Petrarch's initial awe at the view from the summit gave way to the realization that his selfhood, and all in life that he believed could be attributed to it, was the only "truth" available to man because it alone was Godlike in the chaos of this world. It made him understand that the only path through the uncertainty of material existence, the only way to achieve salvation and overcome otherness, was through an attempt to actively make the self like God through the exercise of a creative will possessed by man alone in nature. As Petrarch writes, on descending from the mountain its appearance had changed in tandem with his worldview. He turned back to look at the summit, but it "seemed to me scarcely a cubit high in comparison with the loftiness of human meditation if only it were not plunged into the mire of earthly filthiness" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 179; *Rerum Familiarium Libri IV*, 1).²³⁸

Grace and Salvation through Fame

Petrarch would date the beginning of his transformation from the depravity of the "*vulgus*" and the material, of his slavish dependence on nature, to the virtue of the "great men" that culminated on his reaching the summit of Mount Ventoux, to his first taste of the unrequited

²³⁸ Like several other significant events in Petrarch's life, it is likely that his ascent of the mountain was, if not entirely fictitious, at the very least misrepresented to better serve his humanist agenda. But Petrarch was a very curious man who spent much of his life in the mountain's shadow, so there is no reason to doubt that he did climb it at some point in his life. The respective ascents of the two brothers to the summit is also clearly an allegory and foreshadowing of Gherardo's later decision to become a monk juxtaposed with Petrarch's own struggle against the temptations of the material. The remarkable parallel in age, both were 32, between Petrarch at the time of the ascent and Augustine at his conversion experience in the garden, as well as the fact that their cathartic experiences both followed the reading of randomly chosen yet incredibly appropriate passages, would also strike anyone as being somewhat more than coincidental (Bernardo 2005: Vol. 1, XXIX). As I will later explore in greater detail when I discuss Petrarch's *Secretum*, a work directly modeled on the *Confessions* involving a set of dialogues between himself and Augustine, the important role played by the *Confessions* in this pivotal event, the great pains that he repeatedly took to draw, or even create, parallels between himself and Augustine show that he was Petrarch's "real authority" (Levi 2002: 84).

love of the figure that he would call Laura. Hainsworth suggests that "it is cynical," and I would add even unnecessary, to suggest that Laura never existed and that Petrarch merely sought to use her as a stock female figure on which to project his own literary interests (Hainsworth 2010: X). Petrarch himself refuted the idea that Laura was not a real person in a letter written to his close friend Giacomo Colonna in 1330 when he expressed doubts about her existence (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 102; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* II, 9). But, presumably as an elite resident of Avignon, Giacomo would himself have been familiar with such a noblewoman if she had indeed existed.²³⁹ Petrarch undoubtedly modified or embellished, sometimes far after the fact, much in his life to provide support for his overall project and it is for this reason that Petrarch's intellectual development is often very hard to discern (Trinkaus 1979: 53). But, as is true for so much of Petrarch, the questions surrounding her existence, as with his other possible inventions, are matters purely of antiquarian interest. Whether she lived or not Laura would come to embody as an artistic or literary device, at least in the first half of his life, all for Petrarch that was good in human beings and so would take on a symbolism far in excess of that which could be expected of any real person.²⁴⁰

Perhaps Laura represents the human ideal to which one must strive, the Godlike in man that can never be fully achieved on Earth, which, as with her chastity in the face of Petrarch's alleged repeated attempts at seduction, is denied man in his material condition, but must be valued for its own sake even if it can never be had. She is "that living laurel, where superior thoughts would nest, as did my burning sighs that never stirred one leaf upon its boughs" (Petrarch 2010(2): 120; *Canzoniere* 316). In this way Petrarch's pain at being unable to possess her could also mirror his existential angst, the pain of man due to his inability to escape his lower material nature to live only in the higher plane of virtue for which he is intended (Seigel 1968: 54).²⁴¹ The name Laura, as Petrarch himself repeatedly mentions, derives from the Latin root "lau," meaning praise, as in the infinitive "laudare" and the noun "laus." These words are related to the laurel tree into which Daphne was transformed and that thereafter became sacred to Apollo, the God of music and the arts (Petrarch 2010(2): 87; *Canzoniere* 263). This in turn

²³⁹ It is a remarkable coincidence also that her first appearance to Petrarch and death both allegedly occurred on Good Friday.

²⁴⁰ Petrarch indeed would write in verse in his *Canzoniere* that "he turned into a modest, pure young man in thought and deed, once he swore fealty to her who stamped his heart with her high imprint, and made him her like. Anything rare and noble that is in him, he has from her" (Petrarch 2010(2): 140; *Canzoniere* 360).

²⁴¹ As Petrarch writes he would exchange every gift of fortune for "one glance from the eyes from which comes all my peace" (Petrarch 2010(2): 31-36; *Canzoniere* 72).

obviously relates to the laurel crown worn by poets and others in antiquity. The choice of the name, then, if meant to be symbolic, is clearly an expression of Petrarch's own sense of achievement. It represents the fame that the poet wins from his art and the inextricable intertwinement of this with the salvation that he will achieve in the immortal realm. It is the vision of Laura "that draws me to virtue, and gives me guidance to the final glory, only this parts me from the common herd" (Petrarch 2010(2): 36-37; *Canzoniere* 72).²⁴²

And it was only in exercising these powers, moreover, that man could hope for redemption. Grace could only come to those who were ready for it, through a lifetime not of obedience but of self-improvement and cultivation. In Petrarch's words "it is through the virtues that the direct way leads to the place where it does not lie," meaning that personal autonomy and the self are not in themselves "the goal," i.e. they are not God's salvation, but the path to God because they are what makes man akin to him (Trinkaus 1979: 109). What this amounted to was an emphasis by Petrarch on culture, and especially eloquence and rhetoric, as means of appealing to men as individuals and so of forming souls in accordance with virtue (Trinkaus 1983: 355).

For Petrarch, the self as "virtue" included everything in man's experience that he saw as depending on his will and action alone, and that for this reason was Godlike and eternal. This would include morality and self-containment in a world in which everything was pointing man toward the base and material, the ability to have a subjective connection with art through the perception of beauty, learning not with the aim of material reward but solely for the purposes of personal refinement—a positive attitude toward gaining knowledge for its own sake—introspection, action in a world that is not motivated by that world, and friendship that exists for no other reason than mutual elevation. As just mentioned, he did not simply see these as good in themselves, Petrarch believed that these aspects of man's life alone—because they were not rooted in material considerations—survive his death and that, for this reason, a life lived in

²⁴² More generally and quite simply, Laura could be an expression of poetry itself as an art that brings everlasting fame to the poet and to his subjects. As Mazzotta writes, "the name of Laura... inspires in the poet-lover a host of coiled associations... (she) implicates many possible worlds, and it is the power of her name that evokes diverse experiences which are in themselves literally world's apart and do not properly belong to her but are discovered by the poet's art" (Mazzotta 1993: 9-10). As Hainsworth writes, Laura at different times in Petrarch's writing "is cast as a courtly lady, a goddess, a nymph, a shepardess, a force for Petrarch's ultimate good, a friendly presence, an image of the divine, or a phantasm of his own creation that is distracting him from thinking about the salvation of his soul" (Hainsworth 2010: XXI). These multiple meanings allow Laura to represent the poet's perspective on reality. And it is Petrarch's ability to interpret her in a creative way via his will that is the image of God in human beings incarnate, Laura exists in a parallel world of Petrarch's creation like the parallel world of culture created by the divine achievements of great men. Petrarch's fixation on Laura then could embody his own identification with culture, as most evident in poetry's ability to reconstruct the meanings assigned to the world.

accordance with them was one capable of receiving God's salvation. This is because for him, in a very real way, as with his correspondence with the ancients, as we shall turn to shortly, those who possessed these qualities even if deceased were not dead; they were actually the only people who were alive since their virtue continued to live on after their material demise. As he writes, "I find greater pleasure in being with the dead than with the living. To these truth itself would answer that those men are alive who spent their days virtuously and gloriously; these, rejoicing amidst pleasures and false joys and enfeebled with luxury and sleep, heavy with drinking, although they appear to be alive, are instead nothing more than breathing and obscene and dreadful cadavers" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 314; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* VI, 4). And it is for this reason that Petrarch would speak to his books and refer to them as if they were not scraps of paper and vellum but rather as if he were speaking to their authors, as if they were inhabitants in his home, as if through reading them he literally brought them back to life or, more accurately, kept them alive (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 109; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* XII, 8).²⁴³ As Petrarch wrote fairly early on in his life, "I am unable to satisfy my thirst for books... Books please inwardly; they speak with us, advise us and join us together with a certain living and penetrating intimacy" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 157; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* III, 18).²⁴⁴

And the meaning of the eternity of the self for Petrarch in the literal sense of what it would actually consist, as is evident from his extensive use of it in the beginning of his *Africa*, as I will turn to shortly, was the "dream of Scipio," as found in Cicero's *Republic* and in Livy and Macrobius, the description of a "transfigured hereafter for great men" (Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 2, 512). This was a heaven in which, after a lifetime spent in the pursuit of virtue, superior human beings could ascend to their true home in the ethereal and perfect realm of the stars and from there look down upon the insignificance of material life. As Petrarch relates, "heaven's arduous slope you may ascend with joy and leave behind our miserable earth. For here above a life

²⁴³ For him the concept of "books as persons" was an "abiding concept," because a book was an "emanation of personality," selfhood, or the virtue with which he "consistently sought acquaintance" (Wilkins 1963: 21).

²⁴⁴ Petrarch's attempt to align the self through eloquence with something eternal and divine above the base and ephemeral material realm was obviously inspired by Platonism. However, as Trinkaus noted, Petrarch was a Platonist "in aspiration only." It is interesting to note that Petrarch possessed an immense manuscript of Plato's dialogues containing 15 works including the *Republic* and the *Laws*, but he could not read Greek and as a result was largely dependant on the references to Platonism in Cicero and Augustine's writings. In the Middle Ages only three partial Latin translations of the *Timaeus*, *Phaedo*, and *Meno* were widely circulated with the result that, as Petrarch relates, many maintained that Plato was a minor author responsible for only "one or two little books." Petrarch, nonetheless, envisioned Plato as the "greatest of philosophers," as the counterweight to the High Middle Ages' fixation on a Christianized Aristotle.

awaits you which the centuries shall never alter... Virtue alone, that heeds not death, endures. Virtue alone prepares the way to Heaven. So hither, heroes come! Let this last burden be not too great for many backs to bear" (Petrarch 1977: 37).

Yet such an image of the hereafter, though, left the great majority of mankind, what Petrarch called the "vulgus," out in the cold, as far as salvation was concerned (Trinkaus 1979: 82). They had no access to culture and so to the cultivation of the self; they had to work to survive and so lived a life subject to the compulsions of nature and of others. They were not human, as the elites of antiquity also maintained of the poor, because humanity was a quality acquired through study that could only be afforded by leisure (Trinkaus 1983: 343).²⁴⁵ While one of Christianity's greatest strengths in comparison to pagan philosophy, as Augustine had recognized, was its focus on humanity as a whole, Petrarch incorporates a Christian notion of salvation with ancient intellectual elitism. He is indeed concerned for the "vulgus" or the "sightless vulgar herd who set their hopes here on the things that time with such abruptness takes away from them!" But, this is only to the extent that he sees in himself their philistinism and their consequent lack of discipline and morality (Petrarch 2010(2): 154; *Triumph of Eternity*, 46-51). The man of virtue must continually fight against the "vulgus" just as he fights against the chaotic fortune that characterizes the material world only through a self-assertion that above all comes from a commitment to self-improvement through culture. This is why Petrarch stopped writing in the vernacular around the time of his ascent of Mount Ventoux, as he had in the poetry of his youth, and thereafter wrote exclusively in Latin, even in his letters and marginal notes.²⁴⁶ His decision to do this, as Hainsworth argues, was polemical and indivisible from "his whole literary and intellectual stance" (Hainsworth 2010: XII). It was motivated by a feeling that his work was only worthy of a select audience and consequently that while, as he wrote to Boccaccio, "those brief and scattered vernacular works of my youth are no longer mine... but

²⁴⁵ While God could, of course, redeem whoever he liked, Petrarch maintained that a commitment to the self and virtue was an onerous but certain path to the divine, since such a man would become like God, while the piety of the simpleton, comparatively, was, although praiseworthy, of less worth. As he would write in his old age, "All have a blessed journey, but surely the higher, the more conspicuous it is, the more glorious; whence it follows that uncouthness, however devout, is not comparable to literate devotion. Nor can you give me an example of a saint from the unlettered man whom I cannot match with a greater saint from the other group" (Petrarch 2009: Vol. 1, 25; *Rerum Senilium Libri I*, 5).

²⁴⁶ As with all his other works, Petrarch would, of course, continue to compose and edit his Italian poetry until his dying day. His claim to have stopped using Italian was obviously intertwined with his project to bring back Classical learning.

have become the multitude's, I shall see to it that they do not butcher my major (i.e. mature) ones" (Petrarch 2009: Vol. 1, 163; *Rerum Senilium Libri V,2*).²⁴⁷

The man of virtue must also fight, then, against the material world, both in terms of his desire to live comfortably within nature and in his capacity to deal with the adversity with which existence continually confronts him. As the discussion of his ascent of Mount Ventoux demonstrates for Petrarch nature in itself was unimportant, its meaning resided in how it assisted the self in coming to virtue or a Godlike self-determination. In this way nature, like the lives of the *vulgus*, has no value in itself but only in its ability to create conditions whereby a man can rise above them by striving for something higher. It is a means to an end.²⁴⁸ Nature was to be enjoyed only to the extent that its bucolic tranquility enabled self-reflection, and only in so far as one was capable of appreciating that its beauty was a quality not of nature itself but of an active self able to take from it more than a base naturalistic meaning. As Cassirer writes, "for him, landscape loses its independent value and its own content... (it) becomes the mere foil for self-awareness... landscape becomes the living mirror of the Ego" (Cassirer 2010: 143-144).²⁴⁹ Consequently, for Petrarch, to know God it is enough to know the self alone; one need not concern oneself with the rest of His creation; "when he grants this to me, it will appear superfluous to busy myself with other things that are created by Him" (Petrarch 1969: 100).

²⁴⁷ For this reason Petrarch would, ironically, probably be greatly distressed to learn that he is primarily known today for his vernacular poetry and that his Latin works are practically not read.

²⁴⁸ Petrarch loved geography—the first map of Italy since ancient times was apparently drawn at his direction (Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 2, 295)—and he demonstrates in many of his letters an amazing knowledge of the layout of the known world and of current events for a man of the fourteenth century (Petrarch 2005: 267; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* 15, 7). He was also drawn to natural beauty, as his long time residence in the countryside testifies. But Petrarch's emphasis on the self necessitated that he view the natural world as an accompaniment to his own intellect rather than as something worthwhile in itself.

²⁴⁹ Petrarch's negative valuation of the material world, which was constant throughout most of his life, but as we shall see, was especially intensified in its latter half, is nicely encapsulated in an episode that he recounts in one of his letters. On a trip to Rome in 1350 while riding in a large party, as was typical for travellers before the modern age because of the fear of bandits, the horse of one of his companions became agitated and kicked him in the leg. The party was unable to stop and seek medical attention because they were in the middle of the countryside. The only option was thus to press on to Rome as fast as possible, likely forcing Petrarch to remain mounted on his horse for the duration of the journey. When the party finally arrived in Rome three days later the wound was uncovered and shown to be a compound fracture. The bone protruded from his leg and the flesh around it had turned livid and begun to putrefy. Petrarch survived this near fatal injury but was bedridden for a month during which time the smell of the wound forced him to turn away from his own body "with an incredible inability to tolerate it" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 84; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* XI, 1). The disgust with the material that made itself so viscerally and inescapably known to Petrarch during the course of that month caused him to realize, as he writes, that he had "rarely recognized in any corpse as I now do in my own flesh what an insignificant, indeed what a wretched and vile animal man is, unless he redeems the worthlessness of his body by the nobility of his spirit" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 84; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* XI, 1).

And Petrarch even maintained that the fame that he achieved through the art that Laura inspired would purify itself over the course of time through the inability of the material to taint the literary pursuits that he valued so highly. While a man was alive he might enjoy fame for the wrong reasons, because of the adulation of the crowd or the exercise of some coercive power for selfish ends. But, after his death, the fame attached to the name of such a man, as the material factors that motivated it disappeared, would be revealed for what it truly was. The fame of the good by contrast, being good in itself, would, owing to its possession of an immaterial virtue, enjoy "glory for eternity" (Petrarch 2010(2): 154; *The Triumph of Eternity*, 79-81).²⁵⁰

It is speech and writing, because of their non-material nature, that are the point of entry to this distinctly human world of achievement. Culture, in Petrarch's conception, meaning first and foremost literature and the arts, is not simply something aesthetically pleasing or refined, but a built up corporate world that men contribute to over the course of their lives. It is a sort of "second nature," a guide or collective savings account from which men have drawn and contributed since the beginning of time, thereby improving their own ability to receive grace via virtue, and is in this regard a social endeavour (Trinkaus 1983: 377). It is the most sacred thing with which man can engage because culture is the path to a Godlike existence and from this, salvation. But, because this world of virtue is a mental and subjective one that depends on the actions of individuals, it can never achieve the completion of which the Scholastics, for instance, believed their knowledge was capable. This is what Petrarch means when he writes, "let thousands of years flow by, and let centuries follow upon centuries, virtue will never be sufficiently praised, and never will teachings for the greater love of God and the hatred of sin suffice, never will the road to the investigation of new ideas be blocked to keen minds" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 49; *Rerum Familiarum Libri I*, 9). For Petrarch, then, the only tangible goal of knowledge concerning man was self-improvement because it is man's all-important selfhood that

²⁵⁰ As Petrarch writes, "nothing is more inconstant and unjust than the judgement of people on whom fame rests. That such judgement is constantly shaky is not surprising, then, since it is supported on such weak foundations. Thus, fortune has power only over the living; death frees man from her. As a consequence such nonsense ceases and, whether fortune likes it or not, fame follows virtue like a shadow follows a solid body... to summarize my thought most briefly, cultivate virtue while you are alive and you will find fame after your death" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 21; *Rerum Familiarum Libri I*, 2).

determines his actions through the exercise of a Godlike will rather than through the use of some inherent reason.²⁵¹

If man's subjective will is all important for knowledge, as opposed to the exercise of a scholastic reason, then it is also through the use of an eloquence capable of touching the soul directly that men can be made to be good (Trinkaus 1983: 375). Petrarch's principal bone of contention with Scholasticism was that it paid no attention to rhetoric and eloquence, viewing these instead—because of its ultimate denial of subjectivity—as "an obstacle and a disgrace to philosophy" (Petrarch 1969: 53). In contrast, philosophy, Petrarch maintains, must be receptive to eloquence because man's Godlike will furnishes him with a unique individuality, and as a result the message must be tailored to the recipient to have any effect.²⁵² Likewise, the blind imitation of Aristotle by his Scholastic followers was especially offensive to Petrarch, because it was a betrayal of the style that he viewed as the emanation of the individual personality (Witt 2000: 263). Eloquence for Petrarch, the ability of a man to shape his message to the mind of another via dialogue, was the basis of a shared culture, and in this sense he uses the term not to mean the aesthetic quality of speech, as is its modern connotation, but in its ancient sense, in terms of the persuasive power of language to mold human action (Seigel 1968: XIII).²⁵³

An individual's mind, therefore, cannot be separated from his speech, and in training or shaping his speech a man also works on his mind. "Each depends upon the other but while one remains in one's breast, the other emerges into the open" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 9; *Rerum Familiarum Libri I*, 9). Reading and writing amount to the ultimate cultivation of the self because they are the best means for it to deal introspectively with itself. Thus, the study of literature in this way "helps a man of good character who masters it; it advances the journey of life, it does not delay it" (Petrarch 2009: Vol. 1, 23; *Rerum Senilum Libri I*, 5). And indeed the lack of emphasis in the medieval tradition on eloquence was one of the things that created a real

²⁵¹ This subjective approach to knowledge for Petrarch constitutes the proper use of learning given that it appeals to man's individuality and ability to be like God through his willing to do so, as opposed to his ability to use a reason that by its nature implicitly confines itself to the material (Mazzotta 1993: 82).

²⁵² As Petrarch writes, "infinite are the differences between men nor are their minds any more alike than the shapes of their foreheads. And as one particular sort of food not only does not appeal to different stomachs but does not even appeal always to a single one, so it is impossible to nourish a single mind at all times with the same style" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 9; *Rerum Familiarum Libri I*, 1).

²⁵³ This is of course not in the sense of simply tailoring your message to the crowd or the "herd," and so losing yourself, but in the orator's attempt to instill within his public his own idea of virtue. Wisdom lacks the power to speak to a man's will, the real basis of his action, without the application of eloquence. Conversely, eloquence will not be taken seriously if it is simply nonsense. As Petrarch asks rhetorically, for instance, "how could the style of a person who knows nothing at all be excellent" (Petrarch 1969: 62).

sense among the early humanists like Petrarch that their efforts were truly bringing something new to the table, rendering them "particularly significant and revolutionary... in their time" (Trinkaus 1983: 6). And to those who objected that this interest was a sacrilege, Petrarch always replied that without the assistance of the ancient rhetoricians, Augustine "would not have built the City of God with such great craftsmanship and mighty ramparts" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 23; *Rerum Senilum Libri XV*, 6).

The Fall of Man and the Romans

Petrarch's desire for a life lived according to virtue was greatly reaffirmed when he took his first trip to Rome as a guest of his patrons the Colonna in 1337. The appearance of the city at this time must indeed have been a peculiar and awe-inspiring sight. Rome was a Medieval city with a considerable population for the period, around 50 000, but it was nestled amongst the ruins of an ancient predecessor that at its peak in the second century, as indicated in the previous chapter, may have been home to around 2 million people. As he would recollect, the city "appeared empty because of its vast size, (but) had a huge population" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 291; *Rerum Familiarum Libri VI*, 2).²⁵⁴ After arriving in Rome Petrarch was at such a loss for words that he could only write a short letter to his patron in Avignon, confirming his arrival and stating that "in truth Rome was greater, and greater are its ruins than I imagined" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 113; *Rerum Familiarum Libri II*, 14). Petrarch spent most of his time in Rome wandering among the ruins with his guide, a member of the Colonna family, in a state of amazement. At "each step," as he would remind his companion in a letter later on, "there was present something which would excite our tongue and mind" (Petrarch 2005: 291; Vol. 1, ; *Rerum Familiarum Libri VI*, 2). They climbed to the roof of the Baths of Diocletian and gazed upon the city with a bird's eye view discussing nothing but its history and myths (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 291; *Rerum Familiarum Libri VI*, 2).

On his return from Rome, Petrarch was more certain than ever of his commitment to live in what he took to be the ancient mode, a life of commitment to the self. And he would

²⁵⁴ The ruins of Rome were also in much better shape in Petrarch's day than they are now, not only because earthquakes and the elements had had less time to wear them down, but also because the incredible spoliation of the marble on the ancient buildings, statues, and monuments that took place during the Renaissance—marble was often burned into lime to make plaster— had only just begun.

henceforth come to view himself very seriously as a "later born" son of Rome, as the "fruit of a womb long barren... For she, in truth, not having seen his peer over the span of ten full centuries will look upon him with benevolent pride" (Petrarch 1977: 231). He decided to move from the noise and squalor of Avignon to the countryside and purchased a small property in the valley of Vacluse, about 25 kilometres from the city (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 676; *Rerum Senilium Libri* XVIII, 1). His friends protested that he was crazy to give up the notoriety that he had gained in the elite circles of the papal court, but Petrarch maintained that life in Vacluse would give him the opportunity to devote himself to the unimpeded cultivation of virtue. He would be able to focus on himself and on the natural world around him in a way that could act as a stimulus for his own introspective contemplation. He would live a simple life, like a "proto-Tolstoy," dressing like a peasant and eating peasant food, all the while surrounded by his books and a few trusted servants, "wandering around alone, roaming over the meadows and mountains and fountains, living in the woods and in the countryside fleeing human footsteps, following the birds, loving the shadows, enjoying the mossy caves and the blooming meadows" (Petrarch 2005: Vol 1, 312-313; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* VI, 3). The solitude and leisure afforded by life in the countryside would allow him to focus on pursuing the goal of personal autonomy through learning and culture free from the pressures that the expectations of others might exert on him (Mazzotta 1993: 160; Trinkaus 1979: 118). Thus he could live in a way truly befitting a human being by concentrating on the cultivation of his individuality to the exclusion of all else. As he would write towards the end of his life, "even now, as ever, I am desirous of solitude and quiet; I read, I write, I think; this is my life, this my joy, which has been with me since youth" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 493; *Rerum Senilium Libri* XIII, 8).

Petrarch's worshipful relationship with the lifestyle that he believed predominated in the ancient world is most aptly illustrated in the "friendships" that he maintained with the long dead men of the past,²⁵⁵ who he "corresponded" with as if they were alive. Petrarch's initial letter to the ancients was motivated by his unexpected finding of Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* while in Verona in 1345.²⁵⁶ However, his initial enthusiasm at finding the letters soon gave way to sadness and revulsion. Petrarch's image of Cicero as a sage was tarnished because in the letters he appeared to be a man who lived at the whim of fortune. The letters revealed the inner Cicero,

²⁵⁵ Petrarch wrote letters to Cicero, Seneca, Varro, Quintillian, Livy, Pollio, Horace, Virgil, and Homer.

²⁵⁶ This discovery would also serve as the inspiration for the compilation of his own correspondence, something unheard of in the Middle Ages (Wilkins 1963: 51).

not the master rhetorician and philosopher of the writings and orations of "that bright sun of eloquence," as he called him, but the politician and schemer, the childish and at times petty man obsessed with perceived slights and grudges (Petrarch 2009: Vol. 1, 164; *Rerum Senilium Libri* V,2)1, 164). Petrarch begins the letter to Cicero, as he puts it, "not without tears," and then lists some of the more notorious incidents of hypocrisy depicted within them. "You revealed to your followers the path where you yourself stumbled most wretchedly," he continues, "I grieve at your destiny, my dear friend I am filled with shame and disgust at your shortcomings." He then concludes with the words "farewell forever, my Cicero" and the postscript "from the land of the living... in the years 1345 from the birth of that Lord whom you never knew" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 318; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* XXIV, 3). This behaviour would perhaps be akin to writing Karl Marx to complain about his illegitimate child, but it was nonetheless sincere and amply illustrates that Petrarch regarded the men of the past as still alive in some manifestation, owing to their possession of eternal virtue. Petrarch wrote another letter several months later in which he forgave Cicero for his failings, writing that it was his life rather than his intellect that he had censured (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 319; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* XXIV, 4).²⁵⁷

Petrarch's letters to Cicero most effectively demonstrate his approach to the past as something living and as a model for the present. Petrarch did not simply admire antiquity; he idolized it, regarding it as a "Promised Land" whose downfall was accompanied by a loss of the very ability to live a human life. In this way, antiquity's great distinction for Petrarch is directly analogous to Augustine's belief in the greatness of Adam's pre-fall state. He would engage "with our (Italy's) greatest writers in whatever way I can and willingly" to "forget those among whom my unlucky star destined me to live; and to flee from these I concentrate all my strength following the ancients instead. For just as the very sight of my fellows offends me greatly, so the recollection of the magnificent deeds and outstanding names gives me such incredible and immeasurable delight that were it known to everyone many would be stupefied" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 314; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* VI, 4). Petrarch, like many other Italians of his time, took it for granted that Rome's domination of the Mediterranean world was ordained by God himself

²⁵⁷ After listing the works of Cicero that have been lost and describing the way in which the latter is regarded in the contemporary world, he concludes with a lament about the state of affairs at the end of the Middle Ages: "you will wish to know about the condition of Rome and of the Roman state... But it is truly better to pass over such subjects in silence, for believe me, O Cicero, were you to learn your country's condition, you would weep bitter tears, wherever in heaven or in Erebus your lodging may be. Farewell forever" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 321; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* XXIV, 4).

(Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 1, 216). And in this regard he believed that God had signalled through Rome's long pre-eminence among the nations that it was a society of "unexampled virtue" and so worthy of emulation (Petrarch 1973: 48). As Petrarch would write of Rome in the *Africa* only a few years after this visit, "know this: though fallen, Rome shall ne'er be vanquished. To her and to her stock alone of all the nations of mankind this grace is granted. Age will sap her strength; she will grow weary and in crumbling dust decay... (she) shall still be the world's queen, if but in name alone. This title shall she never lose... Your ravaged Rome shall live until the end of time and she shall see the last of centuries, dying on the day the world dies" (Petrarch 1977: 33-34).

Petrarch's attempt to foster in his contemporaries a renewed desire for the virtue that he believed predominated among the ancients initially took the form of a collection of biographies inspired by Plutarch and largely drawn from Livy entitled *De Viris Illustribus*. It should come as no surprise that he chose to write a history of the ancient world via biography given his overwhelming focus on the self. Petrarch hoped that in writing the lives of the ancients he would inspire his contemporaries to shape their own individuality in a way worthy of being remembered (Gillespie 2008: 70). Above all Petrarch hoped that his lives would help in the cultivation of men who would go on to shape subsequent history (Mazzotta 1993: 103). The *De Viris*, as originally conceived, was to include the lives of not just political or military leaders but also poets and philosophers, and in this signalled a departure from Medieval biography, which tended to focus solely on warriors and saints (Witt 2009: 106).²⁵⁸

But Petrarch, in a pattern that would be repeated with many of his works, basically abandoned his *De Viris* part way through its composition. He would return to it four times in his life in a sustained way but never managed to bring his shifting plans for that project to full fruition (Witt 2000: 108).²⁵⁹ He decided to focus his attention instead on the writing of a single life, largely modeled on the *Aeneid*, that he believed would most embody the life lived according to virtue, which he hoped would serve as an example to his contemporaries (Bergin and Wilson 1977: XVI). Petrarch chose to compose his life of Scipio Africanus in the meter used by Virgil, and this probably reflects Petrarch's view at this time that epic poetry would provide a better medium to revisit the past, that it would create a space of freedom in which to perpetuate the

²⁵⁸ The figures in his biographies can best be described as hybrids of pagan wisdom and Christian spirituality (Levi 2002: 85).

²⁵⁹ This is what makes the chronology of Petrarch's works, as with his intellectual development, so hard to define. Throughout his life Petrarch constantly wrote and rewrote his entire body of work and likely even altered his letters as we saw with the ascent of Mount Ventoux.

fame of great men, to bring them back to life and so use their example as an impetus towards a virtuous self-improvement that could bring men closer to God (Mazzotta 1993: 3).²⁶⁰ For Petrarch then the historian must first and foremost be a poet. As he writes in his dedication at the beginning of the *Africa*, "in truth, the poets with such themes as mine are wont to turn to times remote; some send their Muse back o'er a thousand years and others halt not at that ancient mark, but none as yet has sung of his own age, and thus the Muse, with no impediment, wanders through old and unfamiliar years in Freedom" (Petrarch 1977: 62-69). The poet, of epic verse at least, cannot be creative, and so can contribute nothing to culture if he remains locked in his time. He must be capable of breaking away from contemporaneity. This also enables the poet-historian to realize his separateness from the past, his privileged position, to thereby develop a sense of his own agency and individuality (Zak 2010: 9).

The *Africa* was intended to be Petrarch's *magnum opus* that would establish him as the "leading intellectual and poet-historian of his age," essentially meaning the new Homer or Virgil (Witt 2009: 114). It was thereby designed to be a work of self-promotion as much as the central pillar of his whole cultural project up until that point (Witt 2009: 114). It would signal that Petrarch was at the vanguard of a rediscovery of the self that harkened back to the lost glory of antiquity. It would serve in this way to immortalize Scipio's fame as well as Petrarch's. Like its epic predecessors the *Africa* contains digressions, councils of a Christianized pantheon of gods, flashbacks, and fast forwards to Petrarch's own day (Witt 2009: 115). These flash forwards typically pertain to Petrarch himself and occur in dream sequences, as is consistent with the literary manner in which dreams were used in Medieval literature (Witt 2009: 125). Homer tells Ennius in a dream, for instance, who then relates it to Scipio, that "Etruria's Florence, daughter of old Rome... will from her spacious walls deliver him to you... That youth in distant ages will recall with his sweet notes the Muses, long exiled, and though by tribulations sorely tried he'll lure the venerable sisters back to Helicon. He will be called Franciscus; and all the glorious exploits you have seen he will assemble in one volume... How great will be his faith in his own gifts! How strong the love of fame that leads him on!" (Petrarch 1977: 231).

²⁶⁰ The choice of Scipio was an obvious one given that in Petrarch's day the opponent of Hannibal's fame rivalled that of Julius Caesar himself (Burckhardt 1958: Vol 1, 261). Scipio, though, was a republican, and his private life lacked the sordidness of Caesar and his successors that made them unsuitable for a Christian audience. As Bergin and Wilson write in their introduction to the *Africa*, Scipio was known to be, unlike Caesar, "a chaste and temperate man, even a lover of solitude" (Bergin and Wilson 1977: X).

In the *Africa* Scipio is the epitome of Petrarch's classical ideal. He is portrayed as a superior, indeed Godlike, human being and as victorious by virtue of his ability to set himself above the vagaries of fortune. He is "elated by no favouring boon of Fate nor yet cast down by Fortune's hostile dart, unchanged he stands, whatever be his lot, with spirit of serene tranquility in happy times or seasons of mischance. Riches he scorns and all the empty praise the fickle mob bestows; he venerates true glory and he seeks for loyal friends: these are his treasures; these he ever holds by the same faith that wins them" (Petrarch 1977: 72). In contrast Hannibal is depicted as a man at the mercy of the world and as such as lacking an authentic self (Petrarch 1977: 152).²⁶¹ There are compelling passages in the poem, such as the dying speech of Mago, Hannibal's brother: "alas for the injustice of man's lot: the beasts in peace live out their tranquil lives; mankind alone is harried and harassed and driven through laborious year on year along the road to death" (Petrarch 1977: 140). But, for the modern reader, the poem is nearly "unreadable" as Burckhardt pointed out long ago (Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 1, 261). The work lacks action and is full of elaborate and unrealistic speeches that try unsuccessfully to emulate those found in the works of ancient historians. Much of the writing also seems to take the form of mere lists of historical or mythic events aimed at demonstrating erudition to a late medieval audience, but which strike us today as completely unnecessary and trivial. The depiction of Scipio is also ultimately an unconvincing one as he possesses no negative qualities, and this reduces him to a mere caricature or prop for Petrarch's humanist project (Bergin and Wilson 1977: XV).

Petrarch completed his first draft of the *Africa* in Parma in 1342 and provisionally finished the work in 1343 (Bergin and Wilson 1977: XI). Yet like the *De Viris* it remained unfinished in his lifetime and would be repeatedly reworked by Petrarch right up until his final days. This unwillingness to complete a work and thereby lose control of it in a sense, lose the ability to re-work it as a subject, perhaps has to be seen in light of Petrarch's whole valorization of subjectivity.²⁶² But, the hype attached to news of the composition of the *Africa* solidified Petrarch's reputation as a man with an agenda aimed at the re-birth of Rome's greatness and for this reason actually finishing it must have seemed unnecessary and perhaps even potentially risky. The death of Mago was illicitly transcribed by one of Petrarch's friends and widely

²⁶¹ In a dialogue with Scipio prior to his defeat at Zama, he maintains that "true wisdom" consists in the capacity "to curb one's fortune and end the course while she is yet your friend" (Petrarch 1977: 152).

²⁶² The *Africa* would not be published until 1397, twenty three years after his death and long after, for obvious reasons, the initial interest surrounding the poem had faded (Bergin and Wilson 1977: XIII).

disseminated, but beyond this the work was never publicly shared in his lifetime.²⁶³ It was enough for Petrarch's public to merely know that he had conceived of the idea of writing an epic poem in the ancient mode with the aim of reviving the ancient virtues.

And it was the immense interest in the *Africa* that spurred within Petrarch an idea to increase his notoriety. The statesman and proto-humanist Albertino Mussato had first been crowned poet laureate in a revival of the antique custom in Padua in 1317. Petrarch conceived of the idea of also being crowned a poet laureate in order to promote his name and project. This would serve as a sort of dramatic statement to provide an impetus for the wide-ranging cultural regeneration that Petrarch intended to lead. He made this desire widely known to his influential friends and claimed in a series of letters to have actually received two offers of a laureateship on the same day while staying at Vacluse, one from Paris and the other from Rome (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 188; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* IV, 4). Petrarch, of course, opted to be crowned in Rome, and so, in the Senatorial Palace on the Capitoline before an assembly of the Roman people, he duly received the laurel crown.²⁶⁴ But it was the symbolism of the coronation that was its greatest significance. In the words of his contemporary Boccaccio, it reinstalled "Apollo in his ancient sanctuary" and "rededicated to the Romans the Capitol" (Mazzotta 1993: 18).²⁶⁵

At the time of his crowning Petrarch was probably the most famous intellectual in Europe (Gillespie 2008: 49). But he was more than this: he was a true celebrity, a man famous not so much for his deeds—he had published very little after all—but for being famous itself. At the end of his life he would even admit as much, writing that he "was given the poetic laurel while still an ignorant student" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 676; *Rerum Senilium Libri* XVIII, 1). Yet a large part of the mystique surrounding Petrarch among his contemporaries was that he seemed to be a new sort of man, because one in the ancient mode. Always determined to maintain his independence he refused many high offices on the grounds that they would compromise his individuality and so his pursuit of the eternal. Once more, this was all done with the aim of advancing his classicizing agenda. As he said at the speech in which he accepted the

²⁶³ Petrarch did reveal extensive excerpts of the *Africa* to King Robert of Naples during his "examination" for the poet laureate crown in 1341.

²⁶⁴ This bestowed on him the dignities of a professor of the liberal arts, gave him the right to crown other poets, and made him a citizen of the city (Kirkham 2009: 9).

²⁶⁵ Petrarch would later describe his own crowning in the *Africa* in precisely these terms: "(in) triumph he will climb the Capitol. Nor shall a heedless world nor an illiterate herd, inebriated with baser passions, turn aside his steps when he descends, flanked by the company of Senators, and from the rite return with brow girt by the glorious laurel wreath" (Petrarch 1977: 231).

laureateship, "I have not been afraid to furnish leadership on such a trying and, to me, even dangerous path, and many, I think, are ready to follow me" (cited in Witt 2000: 230).

Petrarch's New Historiography

These, then, were the literary and self-promotional components of Petrarch's program for the revival of Roman greatness. As he wrote in his address to the Roman people following Cola di Rienzo's revolution "when was there ever such peace, such tranquility and such justice; when was virtue so honoured, the good so rewarded and the evil punished; when was there ever such wise direction of affairs, than when the world had only one head and that head was Rome? Better still, at what time did God, the lover of peace and justice, choose to be born of the Virgin and visit the earth?" (Petrarch 1973: 47). In Petrarch's conception, the Middle Ages that followed Rome's demise had failed to live up to human potential with the result that "hardly any other age was more wretched or worse" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 123; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* XX, 1). This rendered the world unworthy of human life and made it "a sad and wretched place of exile" (Petrarch 1973: 74).²⁶⁶ ²⁶⁷ At the conclusion of the *Africa*, he expresses his hope that by re-emphasizing the examples of virtue provided by the Classical world, a better age would dawn. In his words, "my life is destined to be spent midst storms and turmoil. But if you, as is my wish and ardent hope, shall live on after me, a more propitious age will come again: The Lethean stupor surely can't endure forever. Our posterity, perchance, when the dark clouds are lifted, may enjoy once more the radiance the ancients knew. Then shall you see on Helicon's green slope new growth arise, the sacred laurel bear new leaves, and talents will spring up renewed, and gentle spirits in whose hearts the zeal for learning will be joined with the old love for all the Muses will come forth again" (Petrarch 1977: 239).

Their wealth of knowledge on every conceivable subject—their power and sophistication— meant that for Petrarch it was self-evident that the Romans were simply the best at everything and that the world had declined in proportion to its separation from their example. It was because of the great superiority of the ancients over the moderns that the humanists

²⁶⁶ Petrarch was the first to use the word darkness in the sense of a "Dark Age" to describe the Middle Ages. He did so once in his *Defence against the calumnies of an anonymous Frenchman* and again in his *Africa*.

²⁶⁷ In his mind he had always been born either too early or too late to partake in an era of human greatness (Panofsky 1969: 10).

believed that an understanding of Rome and its history held the potential to provide the key to understanding everything that was worth knowing and so could serve as "the queen of all sciences, the study that held the key to all wisdom and all culture" (Garin 1965: XXI). This is what Petrarch means when he rhetorically asks "what else is all history if not the praise of Rome?" (*Invective against a Detractor of Italy* cited in Witt 2009: 104).²⁶⁸ And to extricate this past in a way commensurate with his own worldview, Petrarch worked to develop a kind of historiography that was very different from the more objectivist practice of simply recording the past, as in the chronicles for instance, that had predominated in the Middle Ages.²⁶⁹ Medieval histories of the city of Rome, such as the twelfth century *Mirabilia Urbis Romae*, "never rose above the level of basic summaries" and tended to focus on the topography of the city or on its archaeology (Laureys 2006: 34). They did not try to understand the past from the perspective of the individual or to place historic events within their overall cultural context.

Petrarch's approach to history was not so much a difference in content from these earlier approaches to history as it was one of form. His narrative is typically light in imagery and in-depth analysis. He prefers rather to discuss the feelings and emotions that he attaches to particular events and situations. He also always tries to colour his descriptions of the world to as great an extent as possible with these, such as when he attempts to mentally reconstruct Ancient Rome by describing every monument not physically but in terms of how they relate to the men of the past and their actions. As Mazzotta suggests, it is the subject's imagination that "has the power to unify and totalize the parts of the broken world, the past takes shape in the mind of Petrarch" (Mazzotta 1993: 22). In this conception, as he continues, it is the subjectivity of the historian who is installed "as the agent of history, as the hero in the empire of culture... The dense tangle of ruins comes alive only in the mind of the intellectual, and wrest its voice from its sepulchral silence" (Mazzotta 1993: 24). In place of a more objectivist view of the past, then, Petrarch looked at the life and work of individuals themselves in an attempt to recreate and

²⁶⁸ But Petrarch and the other humanists were not simply slaves to antiquity; rather, they applied their immense knowledge of the past to their own world selectively. Oftentimes the classical world did not fit their agenda, as seen in its lack of condemnation for homosexuality and in its incredible misogyny (Levi 2002: 8; Seigel 1968: 257). In these cases the problematic elements of antiquity were simply jettisoned. As Trinkhaus writes, this was especially the case with classical mythology's "portrayal in art and literature of the terrible consequences of man's hubristic attempts to play god" since this "little comported with this Renaissance effort at human apotheosis" (Trinkhaus 1970: Vol. 1, XXIII).

²⁶⁹ As Cassirer writes, "Petrarch was one of the first of those who did not concern themselves with the merely objective content of historical creations" (Cassirer 2010: 129).

understand them subjectively (Cassirer 2010: 129). He sought to understand the lives of the ancients—in a very in-depth and personal way—as a means of understanding their writings. He was the first to focus on the meaning of single passages in isolation from the larger text by placing these in the context of an author's entire body of work (Laureys 2006: 42). He and his followers were the first to compare manuscripts as a means of deducing their reliability, clearly paving the way for the development of modern philology and textual criticism (Nachod 1969: 25; Seigel 1968: 261).²⁷⁰ This also clearly explains why he considered biography both in verse and prose, as seen in the case of his *Africa* and the *De Viris*, the only legitimate form of history writing. It can rightly be said in this sense that as with his praise of ancient Rome, Petrarch's historical research was "the essence of the new 'philosophy'" (Garin 1965: 4). Petrarch had the mind of an ancient in that he possessed an incredible memory but was not especially intellectually creative. His ability to memorize provided at his ready disposal a wide range of information that allowed him to master the ancient sources in a way "far ahead of the most respected classical scholars of his age" (Nachod 1969: 26). The wide-ranging nature of Petrarch's knowledge assisted him and his followers, as would be the case in his edition of Livy's first four decades in the early 1350s, when they sought to not simply copy manuscripts but develop a sense of the grammar and style that characterizes the work of a particular author.

As just reviewed, Petrarch believed that his historiography served a very practical purpose in that it sought to guide humanity to its inherent nature "to heal his own society" by demonstrating that the Romans of old lived "*sub specie virtutis*" (Laureys 2006: 49). For Petrarch and the other humanists, the attainment of a virtuous life was a cultural project enabled by the level of civilization of a given community (Gillespie 2008: 51). All human beings were capable in principle of attaining an authentic selfhood through culture and virtue, but the loss of human potential engendered by Rome's fall resulted from the lack of cultural sophistication of its conquerors. Thus, for Petrarch, the evident failure of human beings to abide by an undeniable nature throughout the entirety of their history does not in itself disprove his conception of human nature. Petrarch maintained that the German barbarians whose kingdoms supplanted the Empire in Western Europe were, of course, biologically human, but did not live in a way capable of

²⁷⁰ His contemporaries trusted his knowledge of antiquity so highly that in one memorable incident the Holy Roman Emperor asked him to evaluate the authenticity of a document, the so-called *Privilegium Maius* (Wilkins 176). This purported to be a collection of deeds issued by Julius Caesar and Nero to the Roman province of Noricum offering it a certain level of autonomy from the Empire. Petrarch quickly determined that it was a forgery by Duke Rudolf IV of Austria owing to his familiarity with the style of the ancients and with their spelling and vocabulary.

realizing human potential. Consequently, life in the Middle Ages, as far as Petrarch was concerned, was not human in the true sense of the word but a wasted animal-like existence characterized by ignorance and blind superstition.

Petrarch actually created the notion of the Dark Ages, which was, of course, used ubiquitously until fairly recently to describe the period in Western European history roughly stretching from Augustine's death to his own time. In contrast to the notion of antiquity that had predominated in the Middle Ages, in which the German conquest had been regarded as a continuation of the Roman Empire—with the Holy Roman Empire literally taken by most to be analogous to that of Rome—Petrarch characterized "his own time not as the transfer of the Roman Empire to German-Christian successors, but as the residue of a decline and fall of a once great civilization" (Trinkaus 1983: 13). And in this way it was self-evident for Petrarch, as opposed to what was the case for his medieval counterparts, that the Roman Empire was gone and thereby had to be actively recreated, which in turn provided a locus for using history in creative ways vis-à-vis the present. This "revolutionized" man's approach to the past in a way that Panofsky compares to Copernicus' heliocentric theory (Panofsky 1969: 10-11). In this light, the individuals that Petrarch characterizes as "the 'barbarians' were not barbarous because they remained ignorant of the classics, but because they had failed to understand them as a historical phenomenon" (Garin 1965: 19).²⁷¹ They were not able to maintain their distance from antiquity and so, not distinguishing themselves from it, could not use it as a model of what could be. In this way perhaps it could be said that the "historians" of the Middle Ages lacked a historical sense at all.

For Petrarch, then, man's true nature was followed, implicitly, by the elites of Rome—i.e. living a life according to virtue—and then lost with the end of the ancient world. But the fall of Rome, the contemporary state of decline, was not an inevitable disaster for humanity. It was, in contrast, serendipitous in the scheme of history in that it allowed for this authentic form of human experience, by virtue of its absence, to be brought into stark relief. It constituted the saving grace, the ultimate redemption, of history because Rome's demise allowed for the value of the virtues of the ancient world to be revealed for what they were and definitely proven in an overt sense in Petrarch's own time. Antiquity was deprived of its "realness," but this allowed it

²⁷¹ As Mazzotta writes, it is the awareness of death in "the perception of ruins" that "is the foundation of Petrarch's project of cultural renewal" (Mazzotta 1993: 7).

to become an object of "passionate nostalgia" for the humanists, one that was an ideal to be longed for and so consciously imitated and recreated (Panofsky 1969: 113). This amounted to a valorization of the idea of loss and rediscovery, of salvation as a solution to a problem that demands resolution. Thus, while all before him had thought of history as a "continuous development," Petrarch "saw it as sharply divided into two periods" the classical and the modern (Panofsky 1969: 10). The creative use of history by Petrarch, again as with the other figures, clearly came from a severance from the immediate past, from its use as a means of projecting present problems onto history that departs from contemporary taken-for-granted evaluations of the past. We can see in this example, then, that history is a place for the subject to come to terms with itself through the creative space for the appreciation of otherness that it provides. It is a means of escape from the grey objectivism that presses in on man and restricts him through maintaining the illusion that the world simply is what he takes it to be.

Petrarch portrayed the end of the Dark Age that he hoped would occur through the re-orientation of man to Classical values to the "'dawn of light' ushered in by the Incarnation" (Mazzotta 1993: 18). Petrarch's conception of the Incarnation is an especially striking example of his attempt to create a new vision of Christ and Christianity through linking these to Classical virtues (Gillespie 2008: 56). For Petrarch, God had become a man on Earth not to build a bridge over which a redeemed humanity could cross through obedience to a church that sanctioned salvation but to signal man's greatness to him. Christ was the "second Adam" who came to remind man that he had an immortal, divine-like, nature and so lift him from degradation by turning his mind toward the eternal. And to those who sought to label them as impious, Petrarch and the humanists continually responded that it was in fact only through an understanding of the intellectual milieu in which Christianity and the Church fathers had emerged that an authentic Christian theology could be grasped.²⁷² And in this way the humanists believed that they did not have "to choose between Athens and Jerusalem or between the City of God and the city of the pagans" (Gillespie 2008: 76). The passion of Christ, the agony of his death, mirrored the perils of otherness that besets man because of his dependence on fortune. But his resurrection provided the living with proof that man could exist in a way that mirrored the divine and so

²⁷² They thought, moreover, that many elements of Medieval Christianity were a corruption of the authentic form of Christianity practiced by the Church fathers, due to the reliance of the medieval theologians on Aristotle's writings and on an Islamic Averroes that "the key to reawakening genuine religiosity was to locate and root out those beliefs and practices that their historical and linguistic scholarship increasingly revealed to be later additions to Christianity" (Gillespie 2008: 76).

could rise above chaos and achieve a Godlike existence (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, XXIII). This was an encouragement for man to try to resemble an omnipotent God through his deeds and so fulfill his human potential, rather than a devaluation of human activity through humility and obedience (Trinkaus 1983: 454).²⁷³ And obtaining this form of true religion, or real Christianity, was completely intertwined with Petrarch's historical investigations.

In nominalist fashion, Petrarch writes that God "did not assume any other body and soul than that of man (although he could have done so)" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 225; *De Remediis* 2, 93). He chose that of a man so that the latter would be glorified and so come to realize his potential.²⁷⁴ This is therefore an image of divinity that is completely tied to man but in a manner entirely different from Augustine's conception. Man's nature resides in his identity to God through his activity on Earth rather than in his capacity to become the God-man in paradise through trying to minimize his own activity. Man must behave like a man to become like a God through the use of his will and creative powers, rather than try to minimize these in the interests of his salvation. Man's true role consequently is not to be a creature defined by obedience but rather one who is "actively assertive, cunningly designing, storming the gates of heaven" (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, XXI).²⁷⁵

Christianity, then, in Petrarch's conception, was not formed in opposition to Classical culture or to supplant it, but was rather its fulfilment. This is the essence of his scheme of history. In pointing man toward the eternal through the promise of immortality, through the definitive proof of it provided by the resurrection, Christianity demonstrated "the kinship and linkage among the virtues, the philosophers discuss, that he who has one virtue must have all, whence follows that he who lacks one lacks all of them" namely that men must turn their minds to the eternal, to their own selfhood, to fulfill their nature (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 1, 323; *De Remediis* 1, 122). The life of virtue for which all the philosophers of Greco-Roman antiquity

²⁷³ This emphasis on the revealing of man's dignity in the Incarnation would even lead some later humanists, such as Giannozzo Manetti, to argue that Christ would have returned to Earth even if Adam and Eve had not sinned (Trinkaus 1983: 381).

²⁷⁴ Petrarch would attempt to demonstrate toward the end of his life in his *De Remediis*, as we shall see, that God came to Earth to show man his privileged nature and destiny, his superiority over all the other creatures in existence.

²⁷⁵ As Trinkhaus writes, "the Incarnation, which was the exemplar or image of man's divine potentiality, and the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ, which were the exemplars of man's divine fulfillment, are interpreted by these thinkers, and through the arts as well, as the restoration and renewal of man's high destiny, first gained through his creation. More than that, they are seen as the tokens of man's undeniable glorification" (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, XXIII). This was an encouragement for action, for man to try to resemble an omnipotent God through his actions and so fulfill his human potential, rather than a call for obedience through humility and the devaluation of human action (Trinkaus 1983: 454).

aimed, the immortality that Plato and the others sought through speculation, Petrarch maintained, were fulfilled in Christ's life and example.²⁷⁶ He provided the certain and tangible path to human perfection after which they had striven by removing through his actions, death, and resurrection any remaining doubts about man's destiny and nature. Secular knowledge served as a preliminary to pave the way for Christ, but it was only in understanding the secular that Christianity itself could be understood.²⁷⁷ The two could not be distinguished and were intertwined because the Christian faith was itself the resolution or culmination of Classical civilization. This is an "all-encompassing vision of a harmonized, hierarchically arranged knowledge whereby secular, humanistic traditions are considered as preliminary to the true Christian wisdom" (Mazzotta 1993: 161).²⁷⁸

Crisis of the 1340s

Petrarch did not perceive his opposition to the tenets of the medieval theocracy as an act of impiety. In contrast, his adherence to the Christian faith, as was typical of his contemporaries, was sincere and lifelong (Kristeller 1961: Vol. 1, 361). As just indicated, Petrarch saw himself as in possession of historical knowledge capable of restoring a more authentic ancient type of Christianity obscured by the derivative ignorance of the Middle Ages. And this search for a moral orientation centered on religious belief would be intensified in the latter half of his life. Petrarch had what we would probably call today a mid-life crisis in the middle 1340s that did not so much overturn his earlier views on the importance of virtue and selfhood as cause their re-examination for the purpose of taking them to a level of consistency and refinement that they had

²⁷⁶ Petrarch's God would not be a judging Christ but one of mercy and infinite compassion for Whom, as for man, anything is possible. As Trinkaus writes, "the misery, helplessness, despondency, eternal self-conflict that Petrarch depicts as the normal state of man is resolved by this religious vision which stresses the ascent of man as much as the descent of divinity. Here is one of the theological foundations of the humanists' much repeated theme of the dignity and excellence of man, rooted in a conception of the Incarnation which reverses the traditional emphasis on human lowliness" (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 37).

²⁷⁷ As Petrarch writes, "in the name of charity its voice echoes antiquity and sounds the future. It teaches the studia humanitatis which are intended to nurture the mind through the constant assimilation of the loftiest products of the human spirit from ancient and modern times. The Christian world has perfected the instruments with which to recapture and enrich classical values. The purpose of such studies is truth and not vainglory" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 123; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XX*). Secular knowledge served as a preliminary to pave the way for Christ, and in understanding the secular Christianity itself could be understood. The two could not be distinguished and were intertwined because the Christian faith was itself the resolution or culmination of Classical civilization.

²⁷⁸ This is the explanation for Petrarch's oft repeated comment—in contrast to what we see in Dante—that many pagan figures in Classical Antiquity would have been Christians, such as Cicero, if only "he had been able to see Christ and understood His doctrine" (Petrarch 1969: 115).

earlier lacked. Petrarch came to realize that the fame he had so sorely sought and won had also brought envy, jealousy, and the continuation of the general sense of dissatisfaction with his own life from which he had long thought he would be granted a reprieve.²⁷⁹ He had always been prone to fits of depression. As the child of exiles growing up in foreign locales, he felt like an outsider, he lacked a patrimony of his own, he was dependant on the Colonna and his other patrons, and therefore, in his own eyes, was not his own man. His network of friends and supporters compelled him to spend much of his time at the papal court in Avignon, which he detested, or in circles that he considered boorish and insincere. He had preached the virtues of self-containment and self-reliance to his contemporaries but, because of the absence of these in his own life, had increasingly begun to feel like a hypocrite. Studying antiquity, in other words, had caused Petrarch to believe that he had found the answer to the question of how a human being should live, and his personal crisis stemmed from his realization that he was not living up to the tenets of his own philosophy.²⁸⁰

Following this crisis Petrarch's writings would place a greater emphasis on the distinction between man's divine mind and his existence in a corrupted material world. He "declared war" on his body, on his "gullet, belly, tongue, ears, and eyes" recalling "that many of my misfortunes occurred because of them" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 204; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XIII*, 8). He also claims that by the mid-1340s, he gave up sexual activity, becoming entirely free, as he would write at the end of his life, from "so vile and hateful a slavery," a liberty that he counted "among my greatest blessings" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 673; *Rerum Senilium Libri XVIII*, 1). His earlier emphasis on the centrality of fame would give way to a concerted attempt to change his personal life to abide by the standards of morality that he identified with virtue and salvation. He would no longer rise "from bed to sing the praises of vainglory and the empty fame of men" but "in the middle of the night to sing the praises of my Creator" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 232; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XXII*, 19). He would concern himself more with the cultivation of "salvation than eloquence" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 233; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XXII*, 19). Literary and philosophical pursuits also became something not implicitly worthwhile in themselves but only valuable to the extent that they contributed to the life of virtue that brought

²⁷⁹ The immediate causes for this re-evaluation were his brother Gherardo's decision to join a Carthusian monastery in 1342 and the birth of an illegitimate daughter Francesca in 1343. An illegitimate son named Giovanni had already been born to Petrarch in 1336, but he never mentions the names of either of his children's mothers.

²⁸⁰ Petrarch came to believe that he was being distracted "from the living of such a life as would most surely qualify him for salvation" (Wilkins 1963: 253).

salvation. He would not simply discard the Classics but instead, "with the Muses' assent and applause and with Apollo's support," would devote his "riper years to more important matters"(Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 232; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XXII*, 19). He would only read works that aided this pursuit rather than those that brought him pleasure by the gracefulness of their prose or subject matter, "and from my graying hair," as he wrote, he realized that he had made this change "none too soon" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 233; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XXII*, 19).²⁸¹

The whole movement of the latter portion of his life is toward the examination of the self's existential struggle against what the world has to throw at it and the consequent need, as he puts it, to "compensate for the wretchedness of this place with peace of mind" (Fam 17.4 cited in Mazzotta 1993: 89). Thus, the self became for Petrarch not just a means of aligning oneself to the Godlike but a refuge against the perils of the world as he began to more acutely feel the otherness that besets human life. As a result Petrarch would thereafter endeavour to present himself not as a poet or philologist, but as a Christian scholar and moral philosopher (Hainsworth 2010: XV). These years of crisis would culminate in the writing of his "Secret Book" entitled *De secreto conflictu curarum mearum*, or the *Secretum*, which he would carry with him throughout his life and which would only be published, to wide acclaim, after his death (Marsh 2009: 211). It is directly inspired by Petrarch's lifelong attachment to the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, with the major stylistic difference between the two being that it is written in dialogue form (Wilkins 1963: 37). Petrarch was attracted to this work because of its "first-person point of view" and concentration on "the fragility and relativity of human experience" (Gill 2005: 27-28).²⁸² Petrarch did not set out in his *Secretum* to metaphysically demonstrate the role that the Christian God plays in existence and in the life of the individual, as was the case with Augustine; rather, he accepts the truth of Christianity and then proceeds to outline a sort of practical moral philosophy.

The *Secretum* takes the form of three conversations with Augustine, or Augustinus in the Latinized form, about the immortality of the human soul and Petrarch's inability to find happiness in the face of life's challenges. One of the things about Augustine that lent him

²⁸¹ Likewise, Petrarch more or less abandoned poetry henceforth limiting it to the "embellishment" of his moral philosophy (Letter to Posterity in Letters of Old Age in XVIII.1 in Bernardo 2 673).

²⁸² From the moment that he had first received it as a gift from his mentor, Dionigi, the *Confessions* accompanied him everywhere so "that my hands and the book seemed to be one, so inseparable had they become from endless holding" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 581; *Rerum Senilium Libri XV*, 7).

enormous prestige among Petrarch and the humanists was the simple fact that he had written so extensively (Kristeller 1961: Vol. 1, 362). Augustine's body of work touched on practically every subject and was not lost or hidden away in monastic libraries but was extant and widely available. He was the Church rhetorician and thinker *par excellence* in whose writings could be found all that was believed best in Greco-Roman philosophy. His incredible prominence, the central role that his theology played in underpinning the medieval system, meant that it was as natural for the humanists to use Augustine in attacking the dogmatic philosophy that he had, ironically, largely helped to develop, as it was perhaps for the Hegelian Marxists to use Marx to criticize Soviet Marxism.²⁸³ On the whole, Augustine's life, his very personal striving after the divine, also seemed to embody the combination of action and obedience to God that the humanists sought as a space for reconciling their growing sense of subjectivity with a more traditional Christian faith (Trinkaus 1983: 358).

In Petrarch's early years, Augustine had acted as an interface between Classical culture and Christianity. He served as an embodiment of the combination of the classical values and Christian promise of salvation that Petrarch's writings attempted to disseminate (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 20). Following the crisis of the 1340s, Augustine would still wear the many hats that Petrarch and his successors assigned to him but also came to incorporate a much greater meaning that mirrored changes in Petrarch's overall worldview. Augustine would take on a role directly analogous to the Godlike Sage depicted in ancient philosophy capable of rising above material vicissitudes by virtue of his force of will and self-containment.²⁸⁴ Petrarch evidently read Augustine in a way completely opposed to the way in which he is typically taken today.²⁸⁵ Perhaps not surprisingly, given the ideal elements in his philosophy, Petrarch construed

²⁸³ Knowledge of ancient history and philosophy was, in the 14th century, only available through his writings and that of a few other late antique figures such as Boethius.

²⁸⁴ As we have seen, though, Augustine maintained that all the misery and uncertainty that besets man in his life owed to his own sin alone. And in this way, because he is its original cause, the otherness in the world cannot simply be willed away through an act of the individual. Likewise, man's soul and the material world are not separate higher and lower realms; rather, for fear of making Him the source of evil and because everything in existence is part of His plan, all the things created by God are equally good.

²⁸⁵ As Gillespie writes, Petrarch's characterization of him is "more akin to Seneca than to the Augustine who actually wrote the Confessions or the City of God" (Gillespie 2008: 59).

Augustine as a figure who completely disdained the material and who believed that man could simply will his own salvation if he sufficiently desired it (Gill 2005: 109).²⁸⁶

Thus, Petrarch essentially modifies Augustine's highly negative characterization of man's self-reliance into a positive means of solving otherness and achieving salvation through following the example of the ancients (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 8). Further, it is wrong to simply suggest that Petrarch's reading of Augustine was superficial or simply incorrect because it was above all through this depiction that humanism maintained its connection to Christianity and so won legitimacy in the eyes of its contemporaries (Kristeller 196: Vol. 1, 372). It was only in this way that Petrarch was able to construct "with Augustine as his mentor" a new and highly influential vision of Christianity that has reverberated into our own time (Trinkaus 1970: Vol I 18). As Kristeller writes in the *Secretum*, the "emphasis on man which became so important throughout the Renaissance is here, in its origin, connected with the name and doctrine of Augustine" (Kristeller 1961: Vol. 1, 362).

In the *Secretum* Augustine takes on the role of Petrarch's moral and intellectual guide, as does Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. The relationship between the two that is depicted is really the "dramatization," the internal struggle between the better and worse angels of Petrarch's own self (Gill 2005: 99). But, as with his other writings, it should be remembered that the great men in the past continued to live on for Petrarch by means of their possession of great virtue and that in this sense Augustinus is more than just a sounding board for Petrarch's own angst; rather, he is alive in the author's mind, and as a result, the two figures appear much more familiar with one another than is the case, for instance, with Dante and Virgil in the *Divine Comedy* (Marsh 2009: 211). Petrarch or Francesco, as he refers to himself in the work, is meant to represent the pre-conversion Augustine filled with doubt and self-pity, while Augustinus is Petrarch's conception of the man as a saint (Trinkaus 1979: 58). He is the wisdom of Christianity and Greco-Roman philosophy incarnate and destined to provide resolution to Petrarch's moral crisis (Kristeller 1961: Vol. 1, 361).

The *Secretum* begins with Petrarch sitting alone in the evening in contemplation of "the way in which I came into the world and the way in which I must leave it... wide awake with anxiety" (Petrarch 2011: 5). Truth personified as a woman made of light then comes to tell him

²⁸⁶ While Augustine consistently argues in his writings "against a strictly Platonic understanding of the purity of the soul before its tainting by the flesh, Petrarch's Augustinus—and Petrarch himself—speak as just such Neo-Platonists" (Gill 2005: 108).

"you have already spent enough time—more than enough—looking down at the ground with your clouded eyes. Now, if mortal things attract you so much, what may you not hope for if you lift up your eyes to that which is eternal" (Petrarch 2011: 5). Once his eyes grew accustomed to her brightness, Petrarch noticed that Truth had also brought with her an old man "of venerable and majestic appearance" (Petrarch 2011: 6).²⁸⁷ Truth admonishes Augustine of Petrarch's longstanding devotion to him. She tells him that Petrarch's inability to extricate himself from material preoccupations means that he is "already half-dead" and begs him, because he himself also "suffered much, and in much the same way" while "still imprisoned" in the body, to help Petrarch to heal his soul (Petrarch 2011: 7).

The first dialogue then commences with Petrarch's insistence that the root of his unhappiness lies in disappointment over the state of his own life and that human unhappiness stems from the confusion that accompanies the material realm. Augustine replies that "all foolish people," preoccupied by the bodily, seek to thwart their own inherent ability to find happiness because of the "chains of earthly pleasure" (Petrarch 2011: 10).²⁸⁸ "Remember how the best minds agree," Augustine goes on, contra his actual writings, "that sinning is a voluntary action, so that if the will to it is lacking, there can be no sin. And without sin no one is unhappy" (Petrarch 2011: 15). Augustine then advises Petrarch to draw himself to the eternal and virtuous through continual meditation on his own death and on the unhappiness, contradiction, and disappointment that besets every aspect of earthly life. Once he does this Augustine promises him "an easy ascent" to the eternal (Petrarch 2011: 14).

Francesco objects to the simplicity of Augustine's solution to his problem. "For heaven's sake!" he interjects "No one knows what I suffered, and how I wanted to stand upright" (Petrarch 2011: 17). Francesco then describes the causes of his depression and in so doing highlights his apparent inability to break free from his "dependence on external vicissitudes," on the aimless fortune that seems to control material life (Trinkaus 1979: 66-67). At this point in the dialogue Francesco is still unable to grasp that his unhappiness stems from his slavery to the whims of a material world lacking any reality (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 6). Augustine attempts to

²⁸⁷ By "his priestly manner, his modest countenance, his serious gaze, his sober step, the combination of his African clothing and once he began to speak his Roman eloquence," Petrarch immediately recognized the figure to be none other than "the glorious St. Augustine" (Petrarch 2011: 7).

²⁸⁸ He then urges Petrarch to remember what he has read over and over again with him, i.e. referenced in his own works, the "sacred words" of the pagan philosophers "that no one can be made unhappy... For if it is virtue alone that can make us happy... then it follows that only the opposite of virtue can make us unhappy" (Petrarch 2011: 13).

demonstrate this by describing his own inner struggle, as described in the *Confessions*, to which Francesco replies that when he reads the *Confessions* he has "the impression that I am reading not of someone else's but my own wanderings" (Petrarch 2011: 18).²⁸⁹ Augustine then advises Petrarch to contemplate mortality through reminding oneself of war, of the ruin of even the greatest buildings, of the death of family members, and of the downfall of those more powerful and robust than oneself (Petrarch 2011: 23). Augustine argues that it is the gift of foresight that man enjoys by virtue of his divine reason that allows him to develop a consciousness of his own mortality so "that he has it every day in front of his eyes" and so that from this, he may understand what is eternal and thus aspire to a life in which "he is no longer mortal"; such a person is "someone who really understands the nature of human life" (Petrarch 2011: 25).²⁹⁰ This meditation on death seems to have been the way out of the existential turmoil with which Petrarch found himself consumed in the mid-1340s and is a stoic technique for self-reflection that he undoubtedly read in Seneca. But Petrarch Christianizes this contemplation of death by placing it in the mouth of Augustine and so attaches it to notions of salvation, certainty, and eternal truth.

The dialogue concludes with Augustine's Platonic reminder to Petrarch that just as the "soul was nobly formed in heaven, so... as a result of contact with this body which clothes it, it has since degenerated" (Petrarch 2011: 32). The soul is taken away, says Augustine, from its natural place in the eternal realm through its earthly cares and through forgetfulness comes to identify completely with them and so becomes a mass of anxiety "horrified by its own filth but unwilling to wash itself, aware of the crookedness of its ways, but not about to abandon them, and afraid of the danger that threatens but not willing to avoid it" (Petrarch 2011: 34-35). The material in this conception is simply base and in need of discarding to achieve salvation. The expectation is not that the individual's salvation comes from the ability to reconcile oneself to the whole of nature, as is Augustine's actual view. Otherness is solved, in other words, through

²⁸⁹ Augustine referring to the *Confessions* tells Francesco—again in a way very uncharacteristic of the Augustine that we have described but that suits Petrarch's focus on the self—that he can embrace the perfect and eternal by simply choosing to do so. "I did not change myself until deep meditation had brought all my unhappiness before my eyes. And then, as soon as I really wanted to change, I was able to, and with amazing speed became a different person" (Petrarch 2011: 17).

²⁹⁰ Francesco replies that he is consumed by such thoughts "every single day... and even more at night when the mind is freed from the cares of daytime." At night, he continues, I "arrange my body like that of a dying man, and concentrate on the hour of death and all that will then be most frightful, so that I seem to be in my death agony and see Tartarus and all the horrors you mention" (Petrarch 2011: 28).

abandoning the material for the perfection of the self that alone is real rather than through definitively healing every aspect of man's fragmented experience.²⁹¹

The *Secretum's* second dialogue mainly concentrates on the destructive effect that the deliberate search for fame and knowledge has on the self.²⁹² What lies outside of the self in this conception belongs to God, and is transitory and definitively beyond man. As Petrarch writes in a letter composed at approximately the same time as the *Secretum*, "what brings you happiness or unhappiness exists nowhere except in your own heart. What lies outside of you is not yours, only what lies within you is yours" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 270; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XV*, 7). Francesco's obsession with what lies outside his true purview, Augustine tells him, is most evident in his devotion to winning the applause of the crowd. What is the good of eloquence, Augustine asks, revealing his expectations about achieving total certainty, when "it cannot embrace everything, and what it does embrace it cannot grasp completely" (Petrarch 2011: 39).²⁹³ Francesco admits that he has lived in the past only as others wanted him to and promises in the future to only think of his own selfhood because "the opinion of the public means no more to me than that of a herd of brutes" (Petrarch 2011: 64). Francesco even says later on in the third dialogue that Augustine himself also holds this opinion—again very much against his actual writings—that "I know whom I'm speaking to: no one has ever loathed the ways of the common people more than you do" (Petrarch 2011: 112).²⁹⁴ When tempted by the material, Augustine advises Francesco to repeat to himself that "I was born for something better than to be the slave

²⁹¹ As Augustine says of the material realm and the mind in the first dialogue, again very much in contrast to his actual epistemology, "innumerable images of visible things accumulate and, after going in one by one through the physical sense, they mass in the innermost soul, and weigh it down and confuse it, since it was not created for that, and is not able to contain so many monstrous images. Hence comes that horde of phantoms which mangle your thoughts, and with their fatal variety get in the way of those clear mediations through which we rise to the one true light" (Petrarch 2011: 33).

²⁹² Augustine says to Francesco, echoing Petrarch's criticisms of Scholasticism and the passage read from the *Confessions* on Mount Ventoux, that his knowledge "compared with what you do not know, is like a little rivulet shrinking in the heat of the summer sun compared to the great ocean itself. What is the use of knowing so much - the extent of the earth and sky, the expanse of the sea, the stars in their courses, the qualities of plants and stones, all the secrets of nature - if you do not know yourself?" (Petrarch 2011: 38).

²⁹³ Augustine says that Francesco is a slave to public opinion, "which never judges outright and never calls things by their true name," and which causes men to forget themselves by catering to the mob.

²⁹⁴ Augustine says that Francesco can only begin to become happy when he "sheds the dead weight" of the crowd and of other earthly concerns "to raise your eyes to higher things... It won't be very hard to do so, if only you act according to your own nature" (Petrarch 2011: 52).

of my body" (Petrarch 2011: 43). It is only then that he will be free and "subject to no one... a king, and really powerful, and completely happy" (Petrarch 2011: 51).^{295 296}

The third and final dialogue addresses the fame that Petrarch hopes to win with posterity through his literary work, perhaps personified by his love for Laura, and the barriers that these place on living a life that would qualify him for true immortality (Petrarch 2011: 111). Petrarch insists that Laura is alone responsible for anything that is good in his life (Petrarch 2011: 78-79). Augustine replies, in a revealing way, that it is only her name and its association with fame that holds Francesco's devotion (Petrarch 2011: 90). Augustine then advises Francesco to stop his work on the *De Viris Illustribus* because it is "a waste of time" (Petrarch 2011: 113) and to "abandon Africa to its native inhabitants, since you cannot increase either Scipio's glory or your own: his fame could not be any greater, while you would only limp after him" (Petrarch 2011: 121). Petrarch's preoccupation with these works has caused him, Augustine asserts, to forget himself. He has forgotten the eternal—how to live virtuously—because of his desire for a limited fame in the present and in posterity. Playing the devil's advocate, Francesco replies that he is "not hoping to become a god, to live forever and embrace both heaven and earth. Mortal glory is enough for me." To this Augustine replies: "you are most unhappy, if you are telling the truth! If you have no immortal longings, if you are not concerned with eternity, then you are nothing but dust" (Petrarch 2011: 114).²⁹⁷ The *Secretum* basically concludes with Augustine's reassurance that a man who aims for true worth, at an authentic because autonomous selfhood in his personal life, rather than that "won by all sorts of physical and mental achievements"

²⁹⁵ It is city life, particularly in that "most unruly city on earth, a bottomless choking cesspit overflowing with the filth of the whole world," Avignon, where Petrarch claims that the material barrier to his spiritual salvation and slavery to the vulgar is best embodied (Petrarch 2011: 68).²⁹⁵ Under these circumstances Petrarch says that he feels as though he is in a living hell and so is unable to achieve anything (Petrarch 2011: 68-69). In the city Petrarch is not only confronted by what the worst of the material world has to offer but also loses himself because of the necessity of re-evaluating his behaviour in light of the evaluations that others might make of him. He becomes a passive cog in a larger machine over which neither he nor anyone else could exercise any control.²⁹⁵ Urban life, in Petrarch's conception, was therefore directly analogous to a life lived at the behest of fortune, the chaos of existence, which he saw as depriving man of what was Godlike in his experience. The second dialogue concludes much like the first, with Augustine's Pelagian reassurance to Francesco that he has "fallen into this confusion of your own free will, and that you can, if you really want to, escape from it of your own free will" (Petrarch 2011: 72).

²⁹⁶ Augustine also asks Francesco what he hates about his body, to which he replies "that it is mortal, that it involves me in its pain, that it weighs me down, that it encourages my mind to fall asleep when it should stay awake, and that it subjects me to other human necessities which it would take too long and be too unpleasant to list" (Petrarch 2011: 67).

²⁹⁷ Augustine then recounts Petrarch's conception of true fame, which purifies itself over time into true glory because its worth can only be measured by posterity in terms of what an individual has done rather than from the base material motivations that often confuse present evaluations (Petrarch 2011: 120).

designed to appeal to the multitude, will obtain true immortality by becoming Godlike. He adds that Francesco is therefore "making a great mistake" through his "vain" fixation on material pursuits because in so doing he has precluded himself from living a life worthy of salvation (Petrarch 2011: 121).

The need to return to the self is then the overall message of the *Secretum* and is reflected in the very structure of the work itself. Petrarch's solution to the problem of otherness is his intense valorization of selfhood. In the *Secretum* Petrarch engages in an imaginary dialogue with another human being that is meant to stimulate his ability to find a way out of the morass of the material world through an exercise of will. In the *Confessions*, on the other hand, Augustine essentially accepts his human limitations and throws himself at the mercy of God, with all of his meditations meant to create an awareness of his own inferiority and inescapable sinfulness in order to make him receptive to the divine. In the former case the whole of the work is an intellectual exercise that takes place entirely within the mind of the author, while the latter is a desperate appeal to a power that is so far beyond man as to be nearly unreachable, but by virtue of this is also capable of bringing total deliverance. For Petrarch, then, as opposed to what Augustine put forth, "the soul can serve as its own doctor, (it can) bring itself to perfection" (Zak 2010: 119). The soul can orient itself to an experience of virtue capable of unleashing the self and so of transforming it into something receptive to grace and worthy of receiving salvation (Trinkaus 1979: 88). This is even evident in the way that Petrarch relates to Augustine in the *Secretum*, in his other works, and in over a thousand passages in his collections of letters; it is as one man to another rather than as to a saint or emissary of the divine worthy of worship or petition (Wilkins 1963: 256). The soul in this conception is something to be elevated. Its lack of self-assertion is the problem rather than the means of bringing about a solution. This is the "kernel" of Augustine's argument in the *Secretum* (Zak 2010: 119). The self is something that must be cultivated and from which we are detached because of the alienating effects of material life. And Petrarch's notion of the self was, in contrast to its successors, the purest form of idealism because it was depicted as not something simply able to freely pick and choose among that which the world presents it with, but as capable of literally rising above the world through its own unimpeded potential for self-containment.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ For Augustine and his medieval followers, the opposite was the case: the soul itself was sinful and worthy of condemnation; it was the origin of evil and confusion. It was the result of the misdirection of the will incurred by

Petrarch's Disenchantment

The *Secretum* was written between 1347 and 1353. During these years a series of unrelated events transpired that no doubt greatly reaffirmed the pessimistic conclusions about the negative effect of both society and nature on the self, that Petrarch had come to as a result of his personal crisis. The year 1347 witnessed the beginning of probably one of the strangest, and indeed for Petrarch ultimately one of the most cruelly disappointing, events in the High Middle Ages: the brief and completely unexpected rise to prominence from total obscurity of the innkeeper's son Cola di Rienzo, the "wannabe" restorer of the ancient dignity of Rome. He was, like Petrarch, an avid antiquarian who spent much of his time wandering among the ancient monuments, recording and deciphering their inscriptions.²⁹⁹ From these activities there gradually grew within Cola—as was the case with Petrarch—the image of a great and idolized Rome, meant to rule by nature but now subject to barbarians, due to some accident of history (Cosenza 1913: 4).³⁰⁰ Petrarch was crushed by Cola's eventual failure to live up to his expectations.³⁰¹ It must have seemed to him as if the promise of literally restoring the pre-eminence of Rome in his lifetime, and thus of the authentic form of subjectivity practised by the ancients, had cruelly vanished before his eyes just as quickly as it had arisen. As Petrarch writes

original sin and its consequent divorce from the divine meant that it had to be suppressed to the greatest extent possible. It is this departure from the medieval conception of the self that constitutes the "new form of spirituality" that Petrarch pioneered in the *Secretum* and in his other works (Zak 2010: 161). He viewed this as a return to a more authentic type of Christianity and was successfully able to depict it as such through linking it to Augustine, whose message Petrarch purported to understand better than his contemporaries by virtue of his superior knowledge of antiquity.

²⁹⁹ To his credit Petrarch's persisted in his unqualified support for Cola even though it put his relationship with his patrons, the Colonna family, under serious strain. And Petrarch's faith that Rome could all of a sudden become once again the most important city in Europe was actually not as farfetched as it might at first sight seem given the incredible growth over the course of his own life of the city of Avignon.

³⁰⁰ Petrarch had, in a manner of speaking, put everything on the line for Cola because he believed that "a Roman was actually going to recreate the history of ancient Rome" (Laureys 2006: 45). In Petrarch's mind, as he would write shortly before Cola's death, the man's only crime was no crime at all, "that a Roman citizen should grieve to see his land, the rightful mistress of all others, enslaved to the basest of men!" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 196; *Rerum Familiarum Libri* XIII.6). "How soon was all Italy aroused," Petrarch retrospectively wrote of Cola's revolution, "how great did the fear and the fame of the Roman name spread to the furthestmost countries of the earth! And with how much greater authority would it have spread, were it as easy to persevere as it is to make a beginning" (Petrarch 1913: 322).

³⁰¹ Cola was eventually assassinated in Rome by an angry mob on October 9, 1354.

again, "the more I had hoped in him, the more I now grieve for my lost hope" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 195; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XIII*.6).^{302 303}

Petrarch had resolved to return to Italy upon hearing of Cola's Revolution but was held back for several months. He finally departed in November 1347 on a secret mission on behalf of the Papacy to urge Verona to resist King Louis of Hungary in the event of an incursion into Italy. On route, learning that Louis had beaten him to the city, Petrarch diverted to Parma, where he would live for the duration of 1348 (Wilkins 1963: 74). It goes without saying that this year was one of profound shock for Petrarch and all his contemporaries. As he would write to his best friend the Belgian Ludwig van Kempen, who he nicknamed Socrates: "What shall I say? Where shall I begin? Where shall I turn? Everywhere we see sorrow, on all sides we see terror... would that I had never been born or had died earlier!" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 416-417; *Rerum Familiarum Libri VIII*, 7). In this letter, Petrarch, like many others, seems to have actually believed that the bubonic plague signalled that Judgement Day was at hand (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 1, 419; *Rerum Familiarum Libri VII*, 7).³⁰⁴ On June 27, 1351, Petrarch finally returned to Vacluse (Wilkins 1963: 106). But he was not to remain there for long. An extended stay at the Papal Court in March 1352 to obtain a canonry for his son inflamed his hatred of Avignon even further.³⁰⁵ Petrarch's tenant farmer in Vacluse, Raymond de Monet, with whom he enjoyed an extremely close relationship, also unexpectedly died at the beginning of January 1353 (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 291; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XVI*, 1). And so with little left to hold him in Provence, Petrarch finally left Vacluse for the last time in late May or early June 1353 (Wilkins 1963: 127).

Often in his life, Petrarch's independence and sense of self-containment led him to travel as a means of trying to escape his problems, as he describes it, in the hope "that fortune could be

³⁰² Cola's single-minded determination to bring about Rome's restoration—evidently through the sheer force of his will alone, since so many factors made his rise to power so unlikely—was very much in line with the idealism that underpinned Petrarch's worldview, of man as capable of rising above fortune through simple self-assertion. There must therefore have also been an element of aplomb and self-justification in Petrarch's commitment to him.

³⁰³ Petrarch above all admired Cola because he was able to achieve so much despite being, as he described him, "a simple man of the most obscure origins and not possessed of riches," a man who for all his promise was nonetheless "endowed with greater spirit than constancy" (Petrarch 1913: 322).

³⁰⁴ Most grievous of all the deaths for Petrarch was undoubtedly that of Laura, if she in fact existed, which he alleges occurred on Good Friday, April 6, 1348. He recorded this, as he would with all later deaths of great significance to him, in the margins of the large manuscript of Virgil's works that had once belonged to his father (Wilkins 1963: 76-77).

³⁰⁵ Moreover, an elderly Cardinal named Aubert, who Petrarch writes had been spreading rumours that he was a necromancer (Petrarch 1973: 77), was elected Pope Innocent VI on December 18, 1352 (Wilkins 1963: 122).

changed by changing one's location and ideas" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 84; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XI*, 1). His departure from France was no exception to this pattern. Petrarch's life would change radically after departing from Vacluse. From this time forward he would never return to Provence nor even live in the countryside again. He would spend almost the entirety of his remaining years going back and forth between the principal urban centers of Northern Italy. His political and social connections had up to this point also revolved around the Papal Court. Hereafter, Petrarch would mainly associate himself with the Italian nobility (Wilkins 1963: 128). Petrarch's first place of call on leaving Vacluse was Milan, where he arrived toward the end of June 1353. It was ruled by one of Italy's most powerful political and religious figures, the Archbishop Giovanni Visconti, who was viewed by many as a tyrant. Owing to his celebrity Petrarch was greeted on his arrival by Visconti himself who, eager to attach the city to the prestige that Petrarch's name would bring, promised him privacy and offered him a house on the city's edge (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 318; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XVI*, 11).³⁰⁶

Petrarch would spend the remainder of the 1350s living in Milan and traveling on its behalf as a diplomat. In May of 1356 he traveled to Prague to appeal to the Imperial Court on behalf of the city in a territorial dispute (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 103; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XIX*, 13). He ended up spending a month as a guest of the Emperor and his family and was awarded the rank of Count Palatine (Wilkins 1963: 152). As Dotti writes, the honour with which he was received was tantamount, both in his own and his public's eyes, to his "consecration as the first European intellectual" (Dotti 2006: 74). In December 1359 Milan also sent him on a

³⁰⁶ At the end of 1353 or the very beginning of 1354, another important event occurred in Petrarch's life when the Emperor finally crossed into Italy (Wilkins 1963: 142). His arrival coincided with the beginning of the Little Ice Age in Europe, whose effects Petrarch would refer to many times in subsequent letters. After some delay Petrarch went to the Emperor's winter quarters in Mantua in December of 1354 for a personal audience. This would be the first of several meetings with the Emperor over the course of his later life. Petrarch recounts that the Emperor was, much to his surprise, extremely cerebral and that he asked for copies of the *De Viris* and his other writings. The meeting concluded with Petrarch's demonstration of the need for an Emperor to possess virtue by way of making historical reference to the portraits on the obverses of his collection of ancient Roman gold and silver coins, and with the Emperor's own urging that Petrarch give up the contemplative life and become more involved in worldly affairs (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 101; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XIX*, 3). But, to Petrarch's chagrin, Charles IV "fled" Italy at the earliest opportunity, in the beginning of the summer of 1355, in the face of a deteriorating political environment. Petrarch would send him a letter of reprimand in response, chastising him for losing his nerve by not going to Rome. As he writes, "O Caesar, after gaining without labor and bloodshed what your grandfather and countless others had attained with so much bloodshed and toil—an unobstructed entrance to Rome, an easily obtained sceptre, an undisturbed and tranquil empire, a bloodless crown—... you turn your back on it all and... again return to your barbaric kingdom... you who are the ruler of the Roman Empire long only for Bohemia... you may be called Roman Emperor when in fact you are only King of Bohemia" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 3, 101; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XIX*, 3).

mission to Paris to congratulate King John on his release from captivity following his capture at the Battle of Poitiers (Wilkins 1963: 173). Petrarch was shocked at the state of France in the wake of the double disasters of the Plague and the Hundred Years War. "Where are the swarms of students," he would write of Paris, "the enthusiasm of the university, the wealth of the citizens, the universal cheer? You do not hear the shouting of disputants, but of warriors; you do not see piles of books but of arms; not syllogism or sermon, but the shouts of sentries and the crash of battering-rams echoing against the walls" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 359-360; *Rerum Senilum Libri X*, 2). Petrarch traveled to Paris via central Europe and the Low Countries and the story was much the same in every area that he traversed "in Flanders, Brabant, Hainaut, and lower Germany... I scarcely recognized anything at all as I looked upon the wealthiest kingdom turned to ashes" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 367; *Rerum Senilum Libri X*, 2). It must have seemed like his entire world was going up in flames, and indeed it was.³⁰⁷

Petrarch and Otherness

The pessimism about the state of the world that characterized Petrarch's later life—his frustration at the loss of human potential engendered by the failure of his dream to revive Rome—is best encapsulated in his last major work, *De Remediis Utrisque Fortunae*, or *Remedies for Fortunes Fair and Foul*. It is a moral handbook written as a guide for men on how to maintain their selfhood, and hence humanity, in the face of both the prosperity and adversity that the world beyond the self, otherness, throws at them. As Rawski writes in his five volume edition of *De Remediis*, the first since 1756, the relationship of men to the world beyond themselves, "this core conflict of the human condition and its interlocking relationship with the demands of living, posed by the surrounding world and faced by each and every one, dominated

³⁰⁷ In 1361 the plague would return and devastate Milan. It alone of the major urban centers in Western Europe had been spared the ravages of 1348 because of the extremely draconian quarantine measures adopted by its absolute ruler. But this success no doubt played a role in its later severity. On the plague's reappearance Petrarch left for Padua but his son Giovanni, with whom he had often enjoyed a tumultuous relationship, succumbed to it on July 14, 1361 (Wilkins 1963: 179). The plague subsequently reached Padua later that summer and Petrarch resolved to move to Venice. Interestingly, he proposed in exchange, as he writes for "a small but honourable house," to give the city his private collection of books, then the largest in Europe consisting of some 200 volumes, for the purpose of forming the nucleus of a public library, the first since antiquity, where they could be kept together and not "sold nor in any way dispersed... safe from fires and from rains... in the hope that hereafter... (might be added to their number) other books from public funds, and... private citizens... may (also) bequeath some of their books" (cited in Wilkins 1963: 185).

Petrarch's thought during his later years" (Rawski 1991: Vol. 1, LI). Petrarch wrote the *De Remediis* between 1358 and 1366 (Diekstra 1968: 16). It is his longest work and consists of 254 dialogues in two books, the first dealing with good fortune and the second with bad. Of all his works the *De Remediis* was by far the best received by later generations. It would be the first representative of a literary genre, the moral treatise, that would become "trademarks of the humanist age" (Cassirer 2010: 76). Consequently, the *De Remediis* was a mainstay of Renaissance libraries throughout Europe with 20 printed editions between 1470 and 1650 (Diekstra 1968: 23).³⁰⁸

The work takes the form of "a veritable theatre of the world" (Rawski 1991: Vol. 1, XXIV). It is a sort of guide to temper the reactions of individuals to every exigent circumstance beyond their control or understanding, from childbirth to finding buried treasure, or internal emotional state that could conceivably befall someone over the course of their life. In dialogue form, in the first book, Reason first debates with prosperity's children, Hope and Desire. In the second, Reason debates with adversity's children, Fear and Sorrow, to demonstrate to them that every earthly event, good or bad, is transitory and to some extent, ambiguous or contradictory, in that they are tempered by their opposites, and so rendered imperfect and not what they appear to be, and are consequently not worth placing one's faith in. It is important to remember that in this work Petrarch uses the word reason in the ancient and medieval sense, meaning the individual's ability to mentally exert control of their own life, to not be at the mercy of emotions tied to nature and circumstances, rather than in the scientific sense of cold objective detachment (Diekstra 1968: 44). The aim of the *De Remediis* is to assist the individual in rising above their slavery to circumstance and so develop the level of self-assertion and containment needed to make oneself receptive to virtue. It is to make the reader capable of realizing the true nature of material life.³⁰⁹ Trinkaus rightly suggests that Petrarch's message in the work is "the possibility of attaining moral identity and autonomy, and a serenity and calm under all conditions"

³⁰⁸ As Diekstra writes, "the *De Remediis* enjoyed at once an enormous vogue. Before it was finished, the German Emperor Charles IV invited Petrarch to bring the work and read out passages to him. Its popularity continued for centuries after it was written. Numerous manuscripts copied it; selected maxims found their way into devotional manuscripts, translations appeared in all the principal European languages, various adaptations were made and its influence is evident in a number of other works" (Diekstra 1968: [24]).

³⁰⁹ As Petrarch writes in a letter contemporaneous to its composition, "let us be brave and calm of spirit. Nothing is less worthy of a man than fear, nothing less worthy of a wise man than anxiety. From the day we were born, we have been surrounded by danger and troubles, labors and snares... The gatekeeper has deceived us unless He forewarned us at the threshold of all the suffering awaiting us" (Petrarch 2009: Vol. 1, 31-32; *Rerum Senilium Libri* I,7).

(Trinkauss 1983: 373). Its enormous success owed to the fact that, unlike the religious manuals that predominated in medieval times, it was written as a personal appeal to the reader's own internal struggles and doubts in a way that was desperately needed in chaotic times (Rawski 1991: Vol. 2, XVI).

For Petrarch, as an old man looking back on his life, the *De Remediis* was a way of clearly, even if laboriously, laying out the answer to the problem of otherness that he had reached after a lifetime of experience. It is the most straightforward expression of his feelings on the nature of man and his relationship to the world. He reached the conclusion that one did not have to reconcile oneself to everything in existence to escape otherness' grasp, as was the case for Augustine, but that, in a much more restricted sense in what it allots to man, solving otherness depended on coming to grips with oneself rather than with the external world. In Diekstra's words, "at the end of his life he had come to the position that wealth and poverty made little difference and that everything depended on an internal solution" (Diekstra 1968: 62). Of man, as Petrarch states echoing Augustine's *De Trinitate*, he alone of everything created by God possesses a reason made in "the likeness of God" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 224; *De Remediis* 2, 93). Man has "memory, intellect, and foresight," with which he can come to recognize his own selfhood and thereby understand and live in such a way as to enable him to embrace the Godlike and virtuous in his own experience. Unlike the rest of nature, man is "armed with a mind" that, through its resemblance to that of the Creator, allows him to build his own world of meaning. "If he gets lame and weak, he rides on a horse, in a boat or a carriage, or leans on a helpful staff... he uses all available means to assist and ease himself. He has learned to make wooden legs, iron hands, and wax noses, when these organs are missing, and deals with unforeseen mishaps by preparing medicines to brace his failing health" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 227; *De Remediis* 2, 93). Man is the "lord of the earth and ruler of all living creatures" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 10; *De Remediis* 2, 93). The beasts simply live in an immediacy driven by their impulses and desires, while men alone understand how what they do reflects, and is meant to bring them to, a higher kind of reality. God created everything "in the air, upon the land, and in the sea" as a means of bringing man to Him "all for your use, created to obey your wishes" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 224; *De Remediis* 2, 93). As a result, man does not live in nature so much as he is capable of gaining something for himself from every branch of nature so as to enable him to live more nobly than the beasts. By using the world as a means to the ends that he chooses, "you do

not have the strength of an ox, but the ox plows for you. You do not have the speed of a horse, but the horse trots for you... You do not have the skin of a deer, the fleece of a lamb, or the pelt of a fox, but all they have is for you" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 229; *De Remediis* 2, 93).

As was the case for Augustine, all this makes man more real than nature because of his possession of a mind and consciousness that mirrors the Deity who alone is real and eternal. But in a departure from the medieval view, man's dignity resides not in being an object of nature, its intrinsic part, so much as being a God on Earth (Trinkauss 1970: Vol. 1, 199). "Man alone may enjoy the gift of virtue, hence... none have greater dignity, and none are regarded with greater care by the Creator" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 228; *De Remediis* 2, 93). Yet the gift of man's reason and selfhood is a double edged sword in that while all other living creatures have "the wonderful remedy of a certain ignorance" of themselves, man is plagued by the awareness that he lives in the past, present, and future, and as such can alone recognize the transitoriness and unreliability that underpins a nature ruled by an ultimately inscrutable fortune (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 1, 1; *De Remediis* 1, Preface). Moreover, man's experience of life is subject to constant anxiety and inner conflict through the regret, fear, and foreboding that accompanies this recognition of his temporality. Man is constantly at war with others, with the external world, and with his own anxieties. Petrarch even quotes Heraclitus in the preface to the second book of his work, writing that "of all I have read or heard that has pleased me, hardly anything is more important" than the saying "everything exists by strife" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 1; *De Remediis* 2, Preface). "With the rudder of his reason" man should alone of God's creations "be able to control calmly the course of life and its swirling, turbulent seas" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 10; *De Remediis* 2, Preface). Yet it is because of the very endowment of his mind that the "the life of man" is capable of working against its own Godlike nature and so more "than anything else, consists of strife." This is the nature of the earthly life of man "without any letup, from its beginning to its very end" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 12; *De Remediis* 2, Preface).³¹⁰

Man therefore cannot help but use his advantages against himself and so is subject to continual despair and a sense of doubt concerning his existence. If we contrast Petrarch's view of time with Augustine's, their different conceptions of man's salvation are put into stark relief. With respect to the former, all that accompanies memory and the intellect are in a way things to

³¹⁰ Petrarch interestingly concludes that the life of the animal might be preferable to that of man, that given the adversity that man encounters, "it might almost be better if we had no reasoning powers" at all because "we turn the weapons of our superior nature against ourselves" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 1, 3; *De Remediis* 2, Preface).

be overcome by engendering an awareness within the self that they are by-products or dysfunctions of a selfhood capable of making a man like God, while for the latter it is the memory and the intellect that are in themselves God's presence in man's experience because they actually call the world into being by drawing on God's ideas. True or authentic existence comes, for Augustine, from reconciling the self to everything, while for Petrarch, as we saw with the Neo-Platonists in the previous chapter, it comes from overcoming everything, through realizing its meaninglessness, via the valorization of the self, in comparison to the eternal virtues and God. By the same token, true thinking for Petrarch is not to remember, as for Augustine, but to halt (Mazzotta 1993: 51-52). It is for this reason that Petrarch repeatedly stresses that good fortune is more dangerous than bad: it makes man more dependent on the world through forgetfulness of himself given the blind comfort that the world provides (Petrarch 1973: 69). Virtue, likewise, demands effort since it is by definition extraordinary. It can therefore better assert itself when confronted with adversity (Kircher 2009: 248). Since man's realization of his own selfhood is the solution to his problems, the whole cause of them is also, as Petrarch writes, "to be frank... within ourselves" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 1, 1; *De Remediis* 1, Preface). It is the self's internal response to the world through its fears and anxieties, or through its ability to seek out the eternal, which is the determining factor. Petrarch maintains, therefore, that the internal dangers to man that arise from his inner anxieties and fears are more harmful to him than the vicissitudes of external fortune because they directly impact this selfhood, man's lone means of salvation (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 10; *De Remediis* 2, Preface).

Man's ability to come to grips with the world only depends on the internal state with which he approaches it and not on any external factor.³¹¹ And in this way man should regard the distinctness of his life as defined by the "dynamic possibility" and opportunity that it presents him with, in comparison to the rest of nature, through the capacity to rise above his animality (Trinkaas 1970: Vol. 1, 195). Borrowing from Augustine's *City of God*, Petrarch argues that man's physical attributes, while characteristic of the "vileness" of his materiality, nonetheless speak to his celestial origin. And in contrast to these, it is in the base aspects of his physicality, his "gluttony and sexual incontinence," that man above all bears a resemblance with the beasts: "for sure... these two make your life bestial in the utmost" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 261; *De*

³¹¹ He cannot put faith in nature or in the "bodily goods" since they are subject to the slightest injury and so easily lost (Diekstra 1968: 57).

Remediis 2, 110). But all of this will be washed away at the resurrection when the true "majesty of man" is revealed "when that resurrection comes in which men of true faith must place their hopes" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 227; *De Remediis* 2, 93). It is in the struggle against fortune and internal cares that virtue is gained and the self prepared for salvation, and through this man is reminded that it is only the "lower substance that is subject to death and every kind of affliction" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 270; *De Remediis* 2, 114). What Petrarch means by fortune here, again, is not chance in the sense of fortuitousness, but simply the ordinary human experience of life given man's limitations (Petrarch 2009: Vol. 1, 286; *Rerum Senilium Libri VIII*, 3). Man must realize that in comparison to his own self—because it is Godlike— "no power on this earth is powerful" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 1, 244; *De Remediis* 1, 91). Nothing has true power over man save for God. Even the pain of leprosy "will help you very much indeed" because "it shows yourself to you... It makes you remember that your pitiful body is made of earth, and mortal, not lofty, not everlasting" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 270; *De Remediis* 2, 114).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Petrarch's Christianity precluded him from describing the world as a chaos, as was the case for the ancient philosophers; rather, all events had to come either from man's actions or from God's hidden providence. Nature in this conception, as for Augustine, is a passive object without agency that simply must be acted upon by the only two dynamic forces in existence, God and man made in His image. But man's relationship to providence is no longer one of a completely preordained determinism, but a more open-ended one that exists to enable man to express his agency through self-assertion rather than to ultimately prevent it. As Cassirer writes, gone is the complete unity of man with his fate "yet, when compared with the certainty and comfort of the medieval belief in providence, the new uncertainty signifies a new liberation" (Cassirer 2010: 76). Man is free to choose virtue by being able to "go to war" against fortune. Once again the key component of this victory is man's ability to look to the higher and so to retain in one's mind an awareness of the ever-present prospect of death by always remembering that "the things of the higher mind, especially virtue, shall persist, while the base desires and the physical body must pass away into corruption" (*De Remediis* cited in Kircher 2009: 246). Adopting an orientation to fortune capable of unleashing virtue depends on maintaining one's fortitude, and on not being distracted from the goal by what life throws at you (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 1, 4; *De Remediis* 1, Preface). Such a man is not simply a world-denying ascetic; rather, he is conscious of himself and of his own powers; he reacts to the

world in such a way as not to compromise his prospects of salvation, but must engage with the world to be capable of having these reactions at all.

The objective of the *De Remediis*, then, by demonstrating the transitory nature of every material situation that an individual could conceivably confront over the course of their life, is to create a path for Petrarch's transformation of the everyman into the Sage, the "new Adam," who through the exercise of his unimpeded will can place himself above events through the elevation of his selfhood (Rawski 1991: Vol. 2, LXV). Like the Nietzschean Superman, such a man, in Petrarch's words, will ascend the "loftiest summit of pure intellect" from which he can perceive "the mist of human affairs, the cloud of errors with which we are so surrounded, the many shadows in which we walk... that whatever we generally enjoy or lament in this life is nothing, that what distresses us are mere trifles, what terrifies us as children and adults are spectres, and what casts us down or raises us up is but the gentlest breeze" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 90; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XI*, 3). Above all, man can reach this state of self-containment by coming to realize the unique connection that he possesses to the Divinity and so understand from this that his true existence is not material but something more elevated, permanent, and real (Trinkaus 1983: 373). Again the proof of this is in the story of Christ's Incarnation and the expectations about man's divinity that it created. He became "both, God and man" as Petrarch claims, "so that being made a man He might make man a god... What more, pray, could man, I do not say hope for, but aim at, and think of, than to be God? And, behold, he is God!... What more, pray, does there remain for your desires to sigh about, or to discover, or even to envision?" (Petrarch 1991: Vol. 3, 225; *De Remediis* 2, 93).

Summary

The fame that Petrarch obtained from works like the *De Remediis* continued to increase into his old age. He records in a letter describing a trip that he made down the Po in wartime—thought by all to be impossible—that his presence on the river caused both sides to stop fighting and present him with gifts. He claimed that "with one voice everyone acknowledged that no one but I could have safely taken that route... that no man, great or small, could be found who was not hated nor suspected by either side" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 397; *Rerum Senilium Libri XI*,

2).³¹² Petrarch, by now living in Venice moved to Padua in the summer of 1368, perhaps trying to recapture the feeling of his years at Vaucluse, began building a summerhouse in Arqua just outside the city (Wilkins 1963: 222).³¹³ His last public act as Europe's pre-eminent intellectual was a peace mission on behalf of Padua to Venice in 1373 (Wilkins 1963: 240). By now Petrarch was in serious physical decline; he could barely ride or even stand and required constant assistance. He fell ill at Arqua with an attack of syncope, to which he had been prone all his life, and finally died at the age of seventy surrounded by friends and family just after midnight on July 19, 1374 (Wilkins 1963: 251). After his death the house in Arqua, along with his birthplace in Arezzo, as was typically done only for saints at the time, were both preserved as they were during his life and turned into shrines and places of pilgrimage.

Petrarch's life and writings are today relatively unknown, in comparison to some of the other figures examined in this work. Yet "at the time of his death, Petrarch was the most famous private man in Europe, and during the next 150 years his fame and influence continued to grow and spread" (Gillespie 2008: 69). Whether the Renaissance was a historical epoch of re-birth or merely a continuation of earlier trends is immaterial when it comes to evaluating the figure of Petrarch himself. This is because the impact that he made on the humanists that would follow in his wake was unquestionably enormous. From his core ideas men like Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, Leon Battista Alberti, Lorenzo Valla, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, Giordano Bruno, and finally Erasmus and Galileo would form a well-defined cultural movement that, for all its difference, was nonetheless united in its elevation of learning and culture, in its view of man as divine by virtue of his activity, and in its valorization of selfhood and personal experience (Seigel 1968: 224).³¹⁴ The degree to which the humanists differed from their medieval predecessors is a matter of continuing acrimony in scholarship, yet indisputably they subjectively perceived themselves as offering something completely novel and as living in a "new age" (Panofsky 1969: 36-37). Thus even if the value of most of their work is today questionable, this movement's impact on the formation of modernity was undeniable and

³¹² In April 1367, Petrarch's hopes for Rome's restoration were raised once again when Urban V, left Avignon for Rome. However, he would return to Avignon only three years later. It is quite possible that Petrarch's letter to Urban following his election, as he repeatedly wrote to all the Popes and Emperors, in which he urged him to go to Rome and personified it as a long-suffering woman, influenced the relocation. But it was only to last three years in the face of intrigue by the French cardinals and civil strife in the Papal States (Wilkins 1963: 260).

³¹³ He would move into it upon its completion in 1370 along with his daughter's family.

³¹⁴ "Without Petrarch, there would be no humanists or academics, no great books, no book culture at all, no humanism, no Renaissance, and no modern world as we have come to understand it" (Gillespie 2008: 69).

definitive (Kristeller 1965: Vol. 2, 18). And Petrarch's role in humanism's development can rightly be characterized as that of the initiator of a paradigm shift, in the Kuhnian sense, because "his work became both a model for others and a framework within which they could expand and develop his achievement" (Seigel 1968: 228).

And it was not only in Petrarch's writings but also in the way that he lived that made his example so enamouring to his contemporaries. For all his cultural elitism and ties to the courts of Popes and Emperors, he was at heart a simple and straightforward man. His tastes were not extravagant and he came across to all who met him as modest and unpretentious. Although at times xenophobic, there is very little in the way of religious or ethnic hatred in his thought. He was not a misogynist and praises the great worth of women, as seen in his letter to the Empress Anna, not because of their reproductive capacity but on account of their intelligence. He always professed his disdain for the ways of the common people, but he associated quite closely with them as an equal at Vacluse and in the cities he frequented. Above all, Petrarch was fiercely independent and was, as a result, unusually well-traveled for his time. He was not attached to a place and would leave an area without hesitation out of boredom or when he felt his intellectual freedom to be threatened. He directed nearly every moment of his life not to the acquisition of wealth or power but to study and to discussion with those of like mind. As Petrarch would write towards the end of his life, "I could indeed have climbed higher, but I did not wish to; all heights are suspect to me... I am hardly richer than I was in anything except in years and some books, but I would rather be rich in knowledge and virtue" (Petrarch 2010: Vol. 2, 493; *Rerum Senilium Libri XIII*, 8).³¹⁵ In short, it was Petrarch's laid back and gregarious personality that made him well liked and even, as we might say today, "cool." His contemporaries associated all of these characteristics with the wisdom and enlightenment that they identified with the Classical world and Petrarch consequently became for them the "living representative of antiquity" (Burckhardt 1958: Vol. 1, 212).

As with Augustine, Petrarch's thought was formed in response to his facing an existential crisis that would mirror the sense of aimlessness, despair, and "moral incapacity" that was indicative of the fourteenth century generally (Trinkaus 1979: 111). He would develop his image of the great dignity of man, *homo triumphans*, by shifting the Medieval cosmological

³¹⁵ Petrarch's masterly ability to promote himself is evident in this line, but we can't fault him for his lack of modesty or willingness to rework his own life story to suit his project, as this deliberate cultivation of the self was the very essence of his view of the subject.

emphasis to one focused on the self (Trinkaus 1983: 455). He would look back to the past, and through this, into his own sense of selfhood to find a hidden power and solidity by repackaging the old medieval ideals about man into a new context to create an autonomous view of humanity that would greatly speak to the needs of his contemporaries (Trinkaus 1979: 125). His emphasis on the unbridled freedom of the self meant that his positions were often contradictory; however, the underlying consistency in all his writings was to affirm his unique individuality (Seigel 1968: 60). He viewed himself as having a mission for his own time, that of initiating a cultural renewal capable of aligning human behaviour with its authentic God-given nature. This was a transformative agenda that in its essence was aimed at developing a way for man to come to terms with the otherness with which the medieval worldview was increasingly unable to contend.

Petrarch infused in his contemporaries a sense that their lives had a purpose and a deeper meaning, that they were part of something higher that was "true" and that depended on human beings themselves for its expression, and that from this they too had reality and purpose through the connection of their actions to that in existence presumed to be actually real, to the way that the world really was. As Trinkaus writes, Petrarch was speaking out on "the need to relate religious and moral thought more centrally to the ways in which men experienced their existence. In this he was in close harmony with the concerns of fourteenth-century scholastic discussions of the questions of merits and grace, free will and pre-destination. But his was a man-centered religious outlook, not a metaphysical one" (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, 41). At first sight Petrarch's valorization of the self might seem like an enormous extension of man's purview and capacities in the world when compared to his Medieval predecessors. As we have reviewed above, Petrarch identified selfhood with a creative will alone possessed by man in nature. This wilfulness resembled the will possessed by God; it enabled man to live idiosyncratically—to make choices, like God—and so create in a way unencumbered by his creations. Man's individuality allowed him to orient himself to that which alone in his existence was Godlike, and consequently real: virtue and the other aspects of life believed to depend on this divine selfhood. Everything else in existence was a mere chaos. Everything beyond the virtue that alone was real and worthwhile in nature was, for him, either simply a means to an end to virtue or a foil against which virtue could be cultivated. In this way, as for Augustine, the world was created for man's use—to attain virtue—and man was more alive than nature because of his connection to a God that alone was real. Likewise, when men fell away from virtue they became "nothing." As we

saw, Petrarch described men such as this as dehumanized cadavers, shades of human potential immersed in a world of suffering and disappointment from which they had no remedy.

Petrarch believed that in the roughly thousand year period between Rome's fall and his own time, man had subjected himself to just a dehumanization by forgetting what he was. As he would write later in life, "The Roman race, the human race, has been humiliated long enough. Piety has been in exile and religion trampled upon long enough. And long enough—too long—has unworthy barbarism reigned. All things find their proper place, whether they like it or not; the end of this humiliation and overlong mockery is at hand. When I see it, my life will be complete" (Petrarch 1973: 95). The solution for man's deliverance was to realize his nature and so conform to it. Man could hope to rise above otherness, not merely to cope with it as for the ancients, but by standing firm against the blows of fortune to definitively solve it by using this struggle itself to come to the eternal and so achieve salvation (Trinkaus 1983: 354). For Petrarch, as with the others examined in this work, it was man's very blindness to himself, rather than to the nature of existence as such, that made otherness problematic. In this way, it was Petrarch's emphasis on virtue and the need for man to orient himself to it that was, clearly, very similar to the centrality of obedience to God in Augustine's theology. And so in positing a definitive solution to which man had to conform, Petrarch approached the question of man in the world with the same expectations about his ability to solve otherness. But he did this, as will be the case with the other figures that this work will examine, not in the overt way that Augustine did through building a theology that completely revolved around the idea of the fall and original sin, but implicitly, in adopting Christianized expectations and presuppositions about the world and man's potential in it.³¹⁶ The result was an enormous valorization of the subject as the path to eternal salvation and a providential problem free certainty not found in the ancient figures that he drew upon.

The Humanism that Petrarch turned into a comprehensive program, then, was revolutionary in its positive emphasis on the self as an actor or free agent (Trinkaus 1979: 2). And every Renaissance thinker that would follow Petrarch's example would, when approaching the world, similarly come to emphasize their own perspective as being of the utmost importance

³¹⁶ Overall it can be said that Petrarch combined a Pelagian notion of an individual's ability to actively will their own salvation with an assumption inherited from Augustine and not found in Pelagius or in Greco-Roman philosophy generally, that the otherness in the world is caused by man.

for grasping the phenomena at hand.³¹⁷ Kristeller, following Burckhardt, compares this emphasis on the self to the interest in biography and portrait painting that also grew immensely in popularity during the Renaissance (Kristeller 1965: Vol. 2, 11). This then constitutes Petrarch's oft referenced "invention of individuality." The inner self became both the repository of virtue and the place wherein the disparate pieces of every man's existence were joined together and expressed through the will (Mazzotta 1993: 98). The idea that man's perspective was no longer something unimportant, a barrier to a higher reality, but the key to attaining it obviously was completely opposed to the centrality of obedience propounded by Augustine and his medieval followers (Gillespie 2008: 70).³¹⁸

Because man's self was the only thing in his experience that was ultimately real, was of any value, and so mattered, no man needed to fear the otherness that beset his actions, provided that he remained resolute in his commitment to himself. As Petrarch writes, in an essential passage,

"seeing peace and rest nowhere in all our world, you too return to your room and within yourself; be on guard with yourself; speak with yourself, be silent with yourself, walk with yourself and stand firm with yourself; do not think you are alone if you are with yourself: but if you are not with yourself, though you may be amidst people, you will be alone. Make for yourself a refuge within your mind where you may hide, rejoice, rest without interruption, and live together with Christ... It is virtue alone that is powerful enough to accomplish it all; through her you will be able to rejoice and to live happily wherever you are... What lies outside of you is not yours, only what lies within you is yours; nothing outside of you can be given to you, nothing that is yours can be taken; in your hand alone is found the course of the life you choose" (Petrarch 2005: Vol. 2, 270; *Rerum Familiarum Libri XV*, 7).

At the end of the Medieval world, the divide between man and nature was the pre-eminent challenge to the Church's promise of man's divinity and total reconciliation with nature.

³¹⁷ This extreme individualism meant that, as Kristeller writes, Renaissance humanists would focus in their work and writings to a degree unknown before or since on "the expression of individual, subjective opinion, feelings, and experiences. Every humanist takes himself very seriously and thinks that everything he has heard and seen is eminently worth recording" (Kristeller 1965: Vol. 2, 65).

³¹⁸ Petrarch was the "most self-aware" of men, and the result of this awareness is that we possess more information about his life than of any European who lived before him for the simple reason that he thought more of it worth recording than any other before him (Hainsworth 2010: XXIV).

Augustine's solution to otherness had failed, as we saw Blumenberg extensively discuss in his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, yet this failure could not discredit the powerful expectation of a definitive solution to man's problems, which it promised to offer. Petrarch accepted this divide between subject and object and made it the centerpiece of his own lesser reconciliation, man's joining with something that could offer him certainty by virtue of his self at the expense of a total union with a material world now taken to be chaotic. He did not merely seize upon the contradictions of Scholasticism and make them the basis of his philosophy, as was the case with Ockham, but definitively moved past them.³¹⁹ The medieval world's dogmatic inflexibility left it at the mercy of an apparent rupture between man and nature on which the omnipotence of God that the system relied upon seemed to depend but that, at the same time, ultimately necessitated that man become a free agent in a hostile nature. In developing his own conception of man, Petrarch reacted to the contradictions with which the medieval worldview was unable to contend: selfhood and the dynamism of a world that exceeded man's expectations. He did this, undeniably, through re-visiting the tenets of his own time in a creative fashion via the ancient world and the space that history provides for engaging with otherness. His almost poetic biographical and historiographical works and his characterization of Augustine especially embodied this enormous valorization of the self, as I have shown. Petrarch's idea of humanity was in no way evident from the context in which he lived. And even if we can trace, as anyone can do, how Petrarch's ideas emerged from that context or ontology, this in no way nullifies his own creativity as a subject or lessens the dependency of that change on the exercise of Petrarch's agency through the creative space that the appreciation of otherness provides. As Levi claims, "the circumstances of his life allowed him to devote himself to study, travel, and writing, but it was his intuitive personal reaction to the cultural situation in which he found himself that wrung from him the brilliant, if often still tentative expression of so many changes of attitude to the whole range of human experience" (Levi 2002: 80-81).

In setting out to respond to the medieval world's "blind spots," Petrarch adopted the position of man reflected by that problematic. He did this because of his expectation, inherited from Augustine and the type of Christianity that emerged in Late Antiquity generally, that man should be able to definitively solve his problems through conforming himself to a particular way

³¹⁹ In the aftermath of the end of the medieval reconciliation, Petrarch and the other humanists "loosen up... the earth out of which will come forth the new, specifically modern view of the relationship of 'subject' and 'object'" (Cassirer 2010: 123).

of life. Or, to put it another way, because of the expectation that man is the essential factor that must be explained. He believed that it was necessary to determine what man was if the challenges posed by otherness were to be surmounted. All that counted for Petrarch—because everything else lacked reality—was man himself and his soul (Kristeller 1965: Vol. 2, 108). For Petrarch, to solve otherness, it was enough to adopt the correct internal orientation to virtue—for man to attend to that aspect of himself—rather than to existence as a whole. And he sincerely believed that over a lifetime of introspectively examining his own selfhood in a way quite uncommon among his contemporaries he had developed a set of practices and beliefs capable of unlocking virtue and so opening the way for man to salvation (Wilkins 1963: 254).

Yet, through his expectations about solving it, Petrarch could not help but react to the degraded view of the subject that the problematic of his time reflected, thereby using history's creative space for engaging with otherness to construct a system that ultimately helped to diminish man's capacities. The result was that, in a way that we will see repeated in the other figures examined in this study, man was given less of a role to play in Petrarch's solution to the problem of otherness than in Augustine's conception. This is in contrast to the accepted view of the Renaissance, which envisions it as amounting to a huge elevation of man and his abilities. Trinkaus, in a typical example, claims that "the capacity and drive of man to command and shape his world was regarded as an emulation of divinity, since it was in this respect that man was created in the image and likeness of God." This is "a new religious vision" of man as next to God (Trinkaus 1970: Vol. 1, XX). Gillespie also writes that humanism was successful because it "vastly narrowed the ontological difference... separating man and God... Humanism thus sought to answer the problem posed by divine omnipotence by imagining a new kind of human being who could secure himself by his own powers" (Gillespie 2008: 32). This kind of discourse suits Western ideas of progress but are these claims about humanism's alleged narrowing of the gulf between man and God really true? In reality did humanism not make man less Godlike than the obedient view put forward by Augustine, because it set up a part of his experience—the chaos of the material world—as something that was opposed to him. The entirety of existence no longer depended on man's mental connection with God nor did man have the expectation that he could one day become existence itself. Petrarch's view of man was not that of an individual who, through discarding an individuality that was necessarily in error because of the fall, was able to do and become everything through completely reconciling himself to the world, as was the case

with Augustine and his medieval successors. Instead, Petrarch valorized individuality, but in so doing actually greatly restricted the role that man was presumed to play in the world in comparison to the earlier one. Man, in the humanist conception, had only to orient himself to the higher elements of existence, identified with his selfhood, on the pain of losing his very humanity. This is what Kristeller means when he states that for Petrarch "man is no longer the center of the universe, but he is detached from the entire series of existing things and free to choose his own form of life. Thus, the dignity of man is no longer conceived in terms of his universality, but in terms of his liberty" (Kristeller 1965: Vol. 2, 108).

The image put forward of what constitutes salvation, i.e. resolving the challenges posed by otherness, then, itself diminishes and becomes more banal as man is left with less to do in Petrarch's system than in Augustine. It is less ambitious than Augustine's program for human redemption, more self-evident. Similarly, as the image of what man can expect to achieve through his salvation diminishes, so does his conception of what nature itself is. For Petrarch, as we have seen, the chaos of existence is something to be solved definitively through bypassing it in favour of a Godlike virtue that alone has any reality, rather than something to be accepted and coped with, as for the ancients. The part of nature that has value, that man must align himself to, changes from simply being the entirety of man's physical and mental existence, as for Augustine, to only being the higher aspects of man's life identified with his ability to partake in virtue. And thus the part of existence outside of virtue, the chaos of nature, is deemed to have no value. Nature, therefore, the part of it that matters because it holds the key to its entirety, is taken to be that which, as with the salvation that it embodies, corresponds to man's vision of himself. The notion of what otherness is, therefore, as an aberration, itself changes and comes to mirror him.

In any case, Petrarch's overriding emphasis on the self would endure in varied form for four hundred years. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who in my view would define the next epoch of man's view of his own subjectivity and relationship to otherness, was born into the wreckage of the world that Petrarch and his followers had initiated. Petrarch and Rousseau were united by their intensely introspective sense of dissatisfaction with their own lives. Peter Gay rightly classifies them as "world-historical neurotic(s) whose anguish mirrored a cultural situation and whose writings confronted problems other men failed to recognize" (Gay 1977: 270-271). And like Petrarch and Augustine, Rousseau's solution to the problem of otherness would be

completely intertwined with what he felt to be the inauthenticity that characterized his own time and person.

CHAPTER FOUR: Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was an enigma to his contemporaries and remains so today. Like the other figures examined in this work, he was obsessed with the disappointment, the contradiction, the inner turmoil, and the apparent lack of security and certainty that characterizes human existence. A sad and sympathetic character, his was a bizarre and solitary life that was at times comedic, at other times tragic, and consistently full of paradoxes. Desperate for affection, yet often uncomfortable in human company, hypersensitive and ineffectual, always apt to interpret the slightest of remarks in the worst possible way, his rootless wandering existence was, by his own admission, full of episodes so strange, yet meaningful and somehow formative, that when he set out to write his autobiography, he was, in an extremely novel fashion, unable—as Petrarch would no doubt have done—to explain away their significance by solely concentrating on his accomplishments (Damrosch 2007: 28-29). Despite seemingly inserting himself into every class at one time or another and into practically every occupation, Rousseau always, at least in his own mind, remained apart from people. While many of his contemporaries, and still some today, saw him as a vain faker or insincere whiner, he was certainly a man who was undoubtedly unable to form lasting human relationships. In his need for affection it was all or nothing with him. Total infatuation would inevitably lead to full disappointment and contempt, and then to a sense of betrayal. The unbelievable paranoia that characterized Rousseau's thinking in his later days as a result of his mental problems—the elaborate conspiracy theories that he constructed about the powers arrayed against him—turned him into a pariah among those who had been his friends, but only served to elevate him in the public eye to the status of an eccentric sage possessing a new and prescient wisdom. He saw himself as a man who had been endowed, very much to his ultimate regret, with a sort of divine mission, with a purpose that had thrust him into a public role for which his knowledge was suited, but not his personality (Rousseau 2013(2): 21; *Letter to Beaumont*). He would rightly come to see his philosophy as transformative and his ideas would have an enormous effect on how states and men would come to view themselves by, as with the other figures examined in this work, actually changing "the terms of the debate" about what constituted human life itself (Masters and Masters 1978: 24).

The Citizen of Geneva

As was the case for Augustine and Petrarch, Rousseau's birth coincided with a period of transition in Europe that would provide the basis for the nascent stirrings of the incredible changes stemming from the emergence of capitalism and the rise of the nation states that would follow in the next two hundred years. It was a time characterized by a conjunction of events that seemed to point toward a future of increased interdependence between people and a more activist role for the state in shaping the lives of individuals. Across Europe, arable lands were enclosed by elites seeking to maximize the profitability and extent of their holdings. Greater capital investment, the introduction of new crops from the Americas such as the potato, and efforts made to use existing crops more efficiently—the turnip now recognized as a good source of feed for cattle—when combined with the commercial exploitation of a growing number of overseas colonies, served to improve Europe's diet and caused the population to nearly double between 1660 and 1800.³²⁰ This was a time at which the autocratic monarchs were also increasingly attempting to exert absolute power over Western Europe by depicting themselves as embodiments of the nation and by fostering patriotism through engendering a sense of national difference between countries that had mostly been lacking in earlier times when Europeans viewed themselves as part of a "single empire" or as part of a united Christendom (Woloch and Brown 2012: 5). These shifts were more pronounced in some states than in others, but all seemed to point to the importance of this new thing called the Public, or Society, now as distinct from the Court or the Government.

Rousseau was descended from French Huguenots who had fled France for Geneva in the sixteenth century. He was born on June 28, 1712 to a mother named Susan Bernard who, in what he would later describe as "the first of my misfortunes," died of complications several days later (Rousseau 1954: 19). The Geneva in which Rousseau was born was very conscious of being politically different from the rest of Europe, of going against the trend towards absolutism and centralization.³²¹ Geneva had been a self-governing Republic for nearly two hundred years. It was the closest thing "to a classical city state in the modern world" (Damrosch 2007: 16). Its

³²⁰ From approximately 100 million to 187 million, with the greatest growth coming between 1750 and 1800 (Doyle 1992: 5). In this period Europe "broke free of the constraints of a traditional, subsistence society" (Woloch and Brown 2012: 2).

³²¹ Rousseau would, of course, later style himself as a "Citizen of Geneva" to set himself apart from what he perceived to be the servility of the French intellectual establishment.

communal spirit as seen in Rousseau's famous description of the impromptu dancing of the militia and local population in the Place Saint-Gervais, in which he and his patriotic father eagerly joined, was maintained by the very active involvement of the citizen body in public affairs.³²²

Rousseau was a weak child whose lack of parental support, and perhaps shame over this, would spur an almost pathetic insistence all through his adulthood that his parents would have been devoted to him had circumstances not deprived them of a chance to do so. This sense of abandonment would also lead to a lonely, and ultimately disappointing, lifelong search for surrogate mothers and fathers. Learning to read in his father's workshop Rousseau began with Romance novels left by his mother.³²³ Later he moved on to the ancient classics passed down from his mother's well-to-do family, most importantly his favourite book Plutarch's *Lives of Illustrious Men*, with all its examples of self-sacrifice for the larger community and which he claimed to know by heart at only eight years of age (Rousseau 2013: 574).³²⁴ Rousseau grew up, then, a precocious, somewhat isolated, youth with an almost whimsical view of the realities of human existence. "Continuously preoccupied with Rome and Athens, living as one might say with their great men, I myself born the citizen of a republic and the son of a father whose patriotism was his strongest passion, I took fire by his example and pictured myself as a Greek or a Roman" (Rousseau 1954: 20). As we shall see, this lifelong devotion betrays a different perspective on history than what was commonplace among his contemporaries. In place of a mechanical use of the past to prove Enlightenment principles, Rousseau's engagement with the ancients was exceptionally one of a "sustained fantasy" (Gay 1977: 47).

After his father's departure from Geneva, Rousseau would come under the guardianship of his uncle Gabriel Bernard, a military engineer who promptly sent him off, along with his

³²² His father, Isaac Rousseau, was a watchmaker whose itinerant and somewhat hedonistic lifestyle would eventually force him to flee Geneva to the nearby town of Nyon when Rousseau was only 10, after getting into a trespassing dispute with an aristocrat (Rousseau 1954: 23). He would remain estranged from his father until Isaac's death in 1747.

³²³ These, he later claimed, implanted romantic notions in his mind of how people behaved, which through the inability of reality to live up to the fantasy of his expectation, eventually "ended by disgusting me with everything." They also made him desperate for affection and so vulnerable to those who seemed to profusely show it, with the result that he had a habit of abandoning himself "unreservedly to anyone who knew how to make an impression on me by means of a certain jargon of which I have always been the dupe" (Rousseau 2013: 575; *Letters to Malesherbes* 2).

³²⁴ Plutarch, as Rousseau would write shortly before his death, was "the author who grips and benefits me most. He was the first I read in my childhood, he will be the last I read in my old age" (Rousseau 1979(2): 43; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 4th Promenade).

cousin, to Bossey in the Swiss countryside.³²⁵ After his time in Bossey, Rousseau returned to live with his uncle.³²⁶ Now thirteen, he was close to the age of apprenticeship and was soon sent to work with the City Registrar of Geneva. But, owing to the dissatisfaction of his master with his competency, he was soon dismissed from this position and then given over for an apprenticeship to an engraver, one Abel Ducommun, who he claims treated him very badly. The "oafish" Ducommun would beat Rousseau mercilessly (Rousseau 1954: 39), and in his resentment Rousseau grew disinterested in his trade, devoting all his free time instead to reading whatever he could borrow from a private lending library of the sort that was popular throughout Western Europe at this time (Rousseau 1954: 47).³²⁷

One Sunday at the age of fifteen (scholarship has shown that he was mistaken when he claims that he was sixteen in his *Confessions* (Rousseau 1979: 142, ft. 3), Rousseau went out into the countryside with some friends but arrived back at the massive fortifications that ringed

³²⁵ He was cared for there for two years by the Protestant Pastor M. Lambercier and his sister, whose role were analogous to that of foster parents. Mlle Lambercier was a mother figure for Rousseau, even if only in his own mind, and also a disciplinarian in whose beatings the young confused boy would come to find a lifelong, secret, sensuality (Rousseau 1954: 25). All of this was only candidly disclosed in his posthumously published autobiographical and highly novelistic *Confessions*, the sole basis of almost everything that is known of him until the mid 1730s. The resemblance of this work to Augustine's work and to Petrarch's *Secretum* will be discussed later.

³²⁶ Rousseau remained at Bossey for two years during which time another notable event occurred that contributed to his self-development. This was the blame and subsequent beating unfairly inflicted on him and his cousin by M. Lambercier for the inexplicable breaking of the tooth of one of Mlle Lambercier's bone combs. As Rousseau describes it, he had, prior to this episode, trusted adults unconditionally, believing that they had nothing but the best interests of children in mind and that they possessed the wisdom—a perfect knowledge of what transpired in the world—to put this good will into practice. His childhood serenity, therefore, ended "at that point" with his awareness of human fallibility, and he never again "enjoyed pure happiness" (Rousseau 1954: 30). Henceforth he would come to distrust authority, seeing it as fickle, and would become outraged "at the sight or the tale of any injustice" (Rousseau 1954: 30). The honesty exhibited in his childhood would thereafter also give way to the habit of engaging in petty thefts. He would now prefer to take what he could if he could get away with it, "becoming less ashamed of wrongdoing, and more afraid of being caught" (Rousseau 1954: 30-31). Starobinski extensively discusses the importance of the bone comb episode for Rousseau as the first perception of the otherness beyond man in his life. As he writes "Souls cease to connect, and take pleasure in hiding from one another. Everything is confused, and the punished child discovers that uncertainty in our knowledge of others that he will later (in the first Discourse) deplore... This break constitutes and original sin" (Starobinski 1988: 9). For Rousseau, social nature of man's experience means that this first experience of human limitation must come from his relations with other people then with nature "He discovers that other people do not share his truth, his innocence, and his good faith; it is only afterward that the landscape darkens as if shrouded by a veil. Before the self senses its distance from the world, it experiences its distance from others" (Starobinski 1988: 10).

³²⁷ Rousseau also relates, in an obvious parallel to Augustine's story of the pears, that while at the engraver's he was encouraged by an older boy, whom he was eager to impress, to steal asparagus from a nearby garden. But once he had gone to take the asparagus and had brought it back to the workshop on several different occasions, never having received any himself, he realized that he had been the unwitting dupe of his colleague's manipulations. Christopher Kelly argues that the contrast here was clear and probably intentional. While "Augustine attributes responsibility for his sin to no one but himself... Rousseau looks for an explanation in good feelings misdirected by social forces outside himself" (Kelly 2001: 314).

Geneva later than anticipated.³²⁸ With the gates to the city closed for the night, and at the risk of a beating from his master—for this was the third time that he had found himself stranded outside the walls after dark—he decided to run away. Switzerland was at this time a patchwork of communities divided by political and religious allegiances that reflected its location as the lingering hotbed of the Reformation. Geneva itself was the birthplace of Calvinism, and Rousseau, now beyond the influence of the city, shrewdly, even if perhaps not insincerely, exploited these religious differences. A mere six mile hike was sufficient to take him into the territory of the neighbouring Kingdom of Savoy to the home of a M. de Pontverre, a priest and fanatical Roman Catholic known to take in wayward Protestants (Rousseau 1954: 53). The young Rousseau was feasted and enthusiastically told of a recent convert to Catholicism named Mme de Warens living in the small hamlet of Annecy twenty-five miles to the south.³²⁹ Rousseau set off on foot the next morning and arrived there three days later, on Palm Sunday March 28, 1728. Although in his old age he denied that he had loved Mme de Warens it could be said that he experienced, at the very least, infatuation at first sight for the voluptuous twenty-nine year old.³³⁰ She would be the first person to take the time to care about his well-being, and at this time the only one to believe that he had any potential (Damrosch 2007: 158).

Mme de Warens soon sent Rousseau off to a hospice for converts in Turin, the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia. There he would also work briefly for an engraver and then serve as a footman waiting on the city's nobility.³³¹ After about a year, Rousseau, now seventeen, returned to live in Mme de Warens' house. "From the first day," he writes, "the sweetest intimacy was established between us... 'Little one' was my name, hers was 'Mamma.'" Rousseau's affection for

³²⁸ As he described it, at "A mile and a half from the city I heard the sound of the tattoo and increased my pace. Then I heard the drum-roll and ran my hardest. I arrived out of breath and bathed in sweat, my heart pounding. I saw from the distance that the soldiers were at their posts. I ran up and shouted breathlessly. It was too late. When I was twenty paces away I saw them raise the first bridge. I trembled as I watched its dreadful horns rising in the air, a sinister and fatal augury of the inevitable fate which from that moment awaited me" (Rousseau 1954: 49).

³²⁹ Mme de Warens had fled her Protestant husband and had thrown herself on the protection of the King of Sardinia. As Rousseau would later describe, she was "more or less compelled by the priests to share a pension of two thousand francs... with any riff-raff that came to trade their religion for money" (Rousseau 1954: 55).

³³⁰ In fact, the last thing that he would ever write, the Tenth Promenade in his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, was an uncompleted retrospective of his feelings about Mme de Warens, in which he maintained even in his dying days that meeting her was a turning point: "this first moment determined my whole life and by an incredible chain of events shaped the destiny of the rest of my days" (Rousseau 1979(2): 140; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 10th Promenade).

³³¹ The hospice was sealed with an "iron-barred door," effectively imprisoning all the "frightful cut-throats" housed within. Rousseau relates that it was full of pretenders, Croats posing as Jews or Moors, travellers on their second or third conversion, prostitutes, and sexual deviants one of whom began to molest Rousseau before he managed to get away.

Mme de Warens soon took on bizarre proportions. He recounts that he would kiss the ground that she walked on as well as any object that she happened to touch (Rousseau 1954: 108). After two or three months at Annecy, Mme de Warens decided to send Rousseau to a nearby seminary.³³² The intention was for him to eventually become a parish priest, a choice that must have seemed natural enough given the original purpose of his residency there. But Rousseau, a slow thinker who could only ever learn in his own way, proved a poor student. Throughout his life, he was consistently intimidated by those who sought to teach him anything and the monks at the seminary were no exception. It was his self-consciousness, he would later argue, his fear of other people, that made him unable to learn. He would "pretend to understand" to avoid appearing foolish with the result that he made no progress. At the end of several months, the monks encouraged him not to continue his studies because of his difficulty in learning. He had begun to feel, not without cause, that he was "destined to be rejected by every profession" (Rousseau 1954: 120).

The only occupation that Rousseau would ever excel at in the first half of his life would be music. At the age of twenty, after devoting himself to its study, he took on students, mainly young girls, but it was not long before he was propositioned by one of their mothers. Confused and not knowing what to do, he reported the matter to Mme de Warens. She, and one cannot help but feel sorry for Rousseau when reading his explanation for it, decided to teach him about sex, owing to her desire in his almost childlike rationalization, "to preserve me from dangers otherwise almost inevitable, and to preserve me entire for myself and my duties" (Rousseau 1954: 189). We can see, even in this, the shadow of Rousseau's fixation on what people are willing to do as a result of their fear of others.³³³ At this time Mme de Warens was already intimately involved with her steward, a man whom Rousseau greatly admired named Claude Anet. She proposed that they share her affections in, as Rousseau later described it, "a bond perhaps unique on this earth." Sharing his lover with another pained him greatly and this was perhaps even more the case for Anet who, Rousseau relates, died on a mountaineering excursion of "pleurisy" brought on by overexertion not a great time later.³³⁴

³³² "A melancholy abode," as he writes, "particularly for anyone coming from the house of a charming lady" (Rousseau 1954: 115).

³³³ In his words, he "was sorry for her and for myself. I should have liked to say: 'No, Mamma, it is not necessary. I can answer for myself without that.' But I dared not" (Rousseau 1954: 189). But once she had offered herself, Rousseau could think of nothing else.

³³⁴ Scholars have logically speculated that he committed suicide.

Rousseau must have felt some guilt over how the man had been treated and he soon began to have the first symptoms of the hypochondria, in the form of chest pains and a general state of lethargy, that would plague him later in life. After careful research in medical textbooks, he self-diagnosed his chronic ailments as caused by a polyp on the heart and was encouraged by Mme de Warens, likely tired of his complaints, to travel to Montpellier, a city famed for its ancient school of medicine. After pronouncing himself cured, he returned as always to Mme de Warens, now living in the country at a place called Les Charmettes, but this time he was received very coolly. To his surprise he found, just as he had done to Claude Anet, that his place had been taken by a new lover (Rousseau 1954: 248). Feeling betrayed, the now twenty-seven year old Rousseau made the decision to leave for Lyon in April 1740 to take up the position of tutor to the son of the wealthy Mably family (Rousseau 1954: 252). Lyon was a center of textile production, mainly relying on the relatively new phenomenon, in the French context, of industrial scale silk production performed by orphan girls and other people living on the margins of society (Woloch and Brown 2012: 152).³³⁵ In 1744 Lyon would even see a week of riots and strikes by the guild masters and journeymen against their competitors, the upstart merchants (Doyle 1992: 137). While mentioning none of this specifically, Rousseau nonetheless must have been affected by what he saw there.³³⁶

After inevitably growing tired of this position, he remained in Lyons for little more than a year, but having nowhere else to go, Rousseau uncomfortably returned, for the last time, to Mme de Warens (Rousseau 1954: 255), who continued to treat him with disdain. Feeling hurt, betrayed, and socially isolated, he set about finding a way to put himself back into her good graces by restoring the state of her finances. Over the summer of 1741 he developed a numerical notation system for music, and at twenty-nine, with the support of the Mably family and uncharacteristically brimming with confidence, he headed to Paris to present his idea to the Academy of France.³³⁷ In the Fall of 1741 he arrived in Paris with his notation proposal and a comedy that he had written entitled *Narcissus*, and set about making frequent visits to the Academy where he made "the acquaintance of all the most distinguished literary men in Paris"

³³⁵ The city's poverty rate was actually relatively low compared to its European counterparts, but was seething with resentment due to the brutality of the work and immense profits made by the owners of the factories.

³³⁶ As he would write later in *Emile*, "cities are the abyss of the human species. At the end of a few generations the races perish or degenerate. They must be renewed, and it is always the country which provides for this renewal" (Rousseau 1979: 59).

³³⁷ "I did not doubt," as he writes, "that my scheme... would cause a revolution" (Rousseau 1954: 257).

(Rousseau 1954: 269). But his scheme was ultimately rejected as impractical (Rousseau 1954: 268).

The Philosophes and the Problem of Other People

Finding no luck with the more formal intellectual institutions, he started attending a number of the more popular salons, most notably that of a Mme Dupin (Rousseau 1954: 272). It was through his contacts in the salons that Rousseau was able to secure a post as Secretary to the French Ambassador in Venice (Rousseau 1954: 274). His time in that city, still an independent Republic and long past its glory years, was characterized by his frequent bickering with the Ambassador, whose position he depicts in the *Confessions* as not owing to merit but to social status.³³⁸ After a year Rousseau was dismissed from his post. Back in Paris Rousseau made the acquaintance of a maid at his rooming house of 22 or 23 who would remain his lifelong companion named Thérèse Le Vasseur (Rousseau 1954: 309).³³⁹ Rousseau initially supported himself by copying music and later acted as a secretary to Mme Dupin, at this time writing a book arguing for female equality. Rousseau would take 2800 pages of notes for this project, reading a huge number of texts, many of which dealt with non-European cultures, and from these he later drew much of the material that would go into the *Social Contract*. Mainly through his association with Mme Dupin he also began to spend more time with the men who would one day be collectively called the *philosophes*. The shy, sensitive Rousseau, a self-taught provincial in

³³⁸ The strangest event that occurred while he was in Venice and the one that, of any incident in his life, he later claimed "plainly reveals my character" so as to provide "complete knowledge of Jean-Jacques Rousseau" was his insulting treatment of a prostitute, the "most perfect" woman he ever encountered (Rousseau 1954: 300). But just as he was on the point of intimate contact with her, "suddenly, instead of the fire that devoured me, I felt a deathly cold flow through my veins; my legs trembled; I sat down on the point of fainting, and wept like a child" (Rousseau 1954: 300). Rousseau was overcome by a feeling of incongruity between the woman's alluring demeanour and appearance and the reality of the situation. Upon looking at her he realized that "great men and princes should be her slaves. Sceptres should lie at her feet. Yet here she is, a wretched street-walker, on sale to the world" (Rousseau 1954: 300). It then struck him that the woman's behaviour could only be reconciled with her great beauty if she were in reality "spoiled" by a "secret flaw" that destroyed "the value of her charms." And upon examining her body, his worst fears were confirmed when he discovered that she had a slight deformity in one of her nipples. Telling her about the nipple, she at first thought it was a joke, then upon seeing that he was serious became distant and ended their appointment mocking him as he left with the parting words, "give up the ladies, and study mathematics" (Rousseau 1954: 301-302). The story, of course, highlights Rousseau's sense of dissatisfaction with human existence, his inability to suppress his awareness of the contradictions that always overshadow human life.

³³⁹ Despite her impoverished background and lack of education—Rousseau relates that she was never able to tell time on a clock or to memorise the months of the year in their proper order—he was immediately attracted to her modesty and gentle dignity (Rousseau 1954: 309-311). But notwithstanding what others might have thought of her and to his credit, they would live together for the rest of his life even after he had achieved great success.

the cultural capital of the world and always eager for affection, was at first greatly attracted by the companionship that he found in the salons and by the atmosphere of refinement and sophistication that prevailed within them (van Horn Melton 2001: 174). At these gatherings he would have his first taste of a culture that he would soon come to know, and eventually hate, much more intimately, and which would prove the foil for many of his most original ideas. He took pride in the fact that, for the first time in his life, his talent was being recognized by a group of people, a group, moreover, widely regarded as the social and intellectual vanguard of their time. Diderot especially, who also hailed from modest circumstances, took Rousseau under his wing, acting as a mentor.

The position of the *philosophes* on man, nature, and reason, which Rousseau would ultimately critique and perhaps supersede, was the culmination of the struggle to free European thought from its religious dimension in the wake of the wreckage of the religious wars. Petrarch had connected man to God via the creativity that he possessed as an individual. Martin Luther, who was a humanist trained as a lawyer, in contrast aligned man's individuality completely with that of God by claiming that God actually resided within and acted through man, taking the implications of humanism to their furthest extent given its Christian assumptions. And the evangelical fervour that his theology inspired led to the worst atrocities that Europe would see until the twentieth century.³⁴⁰ The excesses of the Reformation once and for all exposed the weakness and dangers implicit in the idea that man's connection to divinity was the basis of his seemingly godlike actions on Earth. But from this arose the question of where man was to turn, with what was he to ally himself to maintain some kind of grounding or basis for action, to save himself from being cast adrift in a world of his own imagination. The answer seemed only to be to nature itself and the first step in this direction was taken by René Descartes, who maintained that the existence of a benevolent God, as deduced through the use of man's reason, proved that a certain knowledge of the world was possible because God had implanted logical certainties in both nature and the human mind to give the world a structure and so intelligibility (Gillespie 2008: 217).

John Locke, building on the ideas of Francis Bacon, departed from Cartesianism's notion of sure and certain truth in innate ideas and more or less laid the bedrock for what would become

³⁴⁰ Dorinda Outram compares the "past full of religious intolerance," with which Rousseau's contemporaries would have to grapple, to "the issues raised by the Holocaust" in our own time (Outram 2013: 114-115).

the Enlightenment with his emphasis on the impression that man obtains of this world through his sensations, that direct experience of the world was the only basis of certainty (Doyle 1992: 182). If men's minds were blank at birth—Locke's *tabula rasa*—and simply passively obtained sense perceptions that they turned into ideas of reality, then by using their minds rightly—by not forming false ideas—they could hope, if not to metaphysically grasp the world as it really was in the old religious sense, at the very least, to understand its regularities. They could do this through what Locke described as the distinct human ability to think about one's sense perception, or rather to reflect on the mind's perception of its own operation and from this to form abstractions that could be false, by virtue of the fact that they were the product of thinking about the world rather than of the world itself. Implicit in Locke's philosophy is the notion that the only worthwhile ideas are those that relate to things because reliable knowledge can only be obtained through sensation. Likewise, if the world that man knows is merely the sum total of his ideas, then there is no basis for limiting the free enquiry of others into that world, since one idea is never more innately true than another (Woloch and Brown 2012: 191-192).

It was left to France, ironically, the part of Western Europe in which traditional ideas were most entrenched and in which the authorities were least receptive to intellectual novelty, to bring the ideas of the Enlightenment to their fullest expression. The repressive atmosphere of the *ancien régime* lent itself, as was not the case in liberal England, to the undermining of all that was regarded as dogmatic in human understanding, of that which stood in the way of man's critical power to subject his own ideas to scrutiny.³⁴¹ It was in France that the ideas of the Enlightenment were first broadly advocated by a philosophical movement composed of a group of men who believed that they could reform the actual basis of society through the application of man's reason. These men went further than Locke, and against taken-for-granted religious notions, in arguing that man was just a part of a self-contained natural world. The world was conceived of as static; its ongoing existence, seeming stability, testified to the fact that it had to be governed by rational natural laws (Simpson 2006: 94). Man was a creature who could observe and understand the operation of nature and so could harness it to his own ends. Through forming judgements by subjecting his own ideas to the scrutiny of what could be known empirically, taking the world as it was and not how one imagined it to be, man was presumed to

³⁴¹ Or perhaps it was the relative impotence of the aristocracy in France, as Georges Sorel once maintained, with its emphasis on polite conversation, that provided the impetus for the reasoned discussion that would become so important for the Enlightenment.

have a critical faculty identified with his "reason." For the *philosophes* human society had to be organized around this critical faculty; it could only be unleashed through creating a space free of coercion—what has since been called the public sphere—a place in which, in the absence of received knowledge with its ties to domination, man could truly, for the first time, turn his mind to nature. And it was through participating in this free exchange of ideas, by drawing on a plethora of disinterested human experience, that a consensus could be built about reality since men were universally presumed to share the same faculties of sensation and reason, thereby serving to advance knowledge progressively towards an ever more perfect, even if never absolutely true, understanding and control of reality (Garrard 2003: 18). It is the *Encyclopaedia*, spearheaded as just indicated by Rousseau's close friend and soon to be enemy Diderot, that stands out above all the other efforts of the *philosophes* to found knowledge on a new more solid footing, and it was emblematic of the Enlightenment's entire intellectual culture (Doyle 1992: 192).³⁴² It intended to provide a tool by which anyone could become acquainted with the sum total of all rational thought. Its format also obviously allowed for periodic updates to reflect the progress of man's ideas, and in a departure from previous works of this nature, it was not funded by a single patron, but through subscribers who paid for their copies well in advance of publication. The dream of the *Encyclopaedia* was that knowledge could be advanced through opening it up to the reading public in a way previously unheard of and thereby enlarging the public sphere.³⁴³

But for all its pretensions to egalitarianism, projects like the *Encyclopaedia* were premised—and this is the point to which I have been building up—on a sense of elitism and egoism, on the *philosophes'* self-perception that they were the intellectual vanguard of their time. And in this, as Peter Gay demonstrates in *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, the *philosophes* greatly resembled the humanists, such as Petrarch, in that both possessed an underlying "consensus of ideals and ways of thinking" (Gay 1977: 268). They saw themselves as initiating something that could save humanity from contemporary ignorance; they were both dominated by a close-knit group of important men who occupied influential positions in society and who were

³⁴² The scale of the project was unprecedented. When it was finally completed in 1772, it consisted of over 72,000 articles composed by 140 authors in twenty-one volumes of text and eleven of engravings.

³⁴³ D'Alembert wrote in the preface to the *Encyclopaedia* that it was a work intended "to change the general way of thinking... All things must be examined without sparing anyone's sensibilities... we must return liberty to the arts and sciences 'by opening to scrutiny the specialized knowledge of educated experts as well as the trade secrets so closely guarded by artisanal corporations'" (cited in Woloch and Brown 2012: 185).

united by a common sense of purpose; and they ostensibly cultivated extensive ties with the rulers of the states in which they lived in the hopes of making their administrations more humane (Gay 1977:258). They were also men of letters based primarily in the most vibrant urban centers of their time who took a great deal of care in conversing and reading each other's work and who presented their ideas in the most aesthetically pleasing way possible. Like Petrarch they distrusted the vulgar masses and would later criticize Rousseau for what they perceived to be his elevation of them. The *philosophes* didn't want knowledge to be extended too readily to the great majority of the population, whose weak minds were still plagued with corrupted ideas drawn from superstition and prejudice (Outram 2013: 137). Voltaire called them "la canaille," the rabble whose "ignorance and brutishness made it impossible for them to help themselves" (Grimsley 1979: 57). The *philosophes*, then, were men among whom, with their penchant for sophisticated conversation and unbridled pursuit of self-betterment, Petrarch would have felt very much at home.

Lastly and most importantly, and in a way directly related to their self-perception as an elite guiding humanity to its true nature, the humanists and the *philosophes* both viewed the knowledge that they possessed as owing to their own effort alone. Their thoughts belonged to them because they were the product of a wilful creativity that stemmed from their own individuality. The *philosophes*, like Petrarch before them, centered their lives on what they viewed as the higher things, an existence characterized by adherence to the distinctly human reflective capacity that is the life of the mind (Melzer 1990: 22). Consequently, they believed that the advantages that they enjoyed stemmed not from chance or structural factors but from a subjectivity capable of rising above all circumstance. If they stood apart from their contemporaries, it was because they simply had an innate intellectual fortitude not enjoyed by the rest of mankind. Neither group had a concept of alienation; they were in their own minds simply the sum of their own thought, their "self." And this is the key point for the purposes of this chapter: whatever changes in Western thought and society that spanned the demise of Humanism to the Reformation and Cartesianism, and finally to the rise of the Enlightenment and the *philosophes*, and for whatever reason they occurred, the constant focus—the locus of investigation and action—remained on the subject itself, the freely acting individual capable of rising above whatever circumstance he encountered merely through the force of his mind and will.

This can best be demonstrated in the *philosophe* view of man as a creature primarily motivated by simple self-interest and the problems that this created for explaining the functioning of society. And it is here that Rousseau, a man of humble circumstances who had had a chance to observe the actual operation of society, would stake his claim to novelty and depart from the views of men that he at one time considered his greatest friends and benefactors. The *philosophes* conceived of man as a creature driven by the need to fulfill desires incurred through sensation or the ideas attached to them. As the natural philosophers of the time believed was the case for all animals, man was isolated from others within the confines of his mind and body; the individual, as the product of accumulated sensation, could not help but think exclusively of himself; he differed from the animals only to the extent that he could reflect and organize his egoism in a rational way. For Voltaire man was a creature defined by his capacity for activity, that is to say for acting, like the other animals in nature, for his own benefit (Berman 1970: 66-67). But in practice this focus on the individual meant the pursuit of self-interest in all situations. Men in society could come together to form ethical systems and values to govern their behaviour *vis-à-vis* each other, but these could only function properly when they corresponded to the natural laws of egoism (Garrard 2003: 26).

And it was assumed that society would function properly in a peaceful, harmonious, and orderly fashion, as was believed to be the case with the self-perpetuating "machine" that was nature, if only men obeyed "the automatic propulsion of self-interest" (Kingsley 1963: 305). By virtue of self-interest individuals would come together rationally and voluntarily to work toward common ends.³⁴⁴ They would see that the satisfaction of their own needs resided in the satisfaction of the whole, and previously harmful natural desires would only be satisfied where appropriate because it was presumed that the "harmony inherent in nature providentially guided the superficial clash of wills towards the greatest good of all" (Horowitz 1987: 40). But, the notion in the Enlightenment that self-interest was the rightful determinant of man's actions raised practical problems owing to the fact that no one could agree exactly on what the pursuit of self-interest entailed. It was necessary to explain how supposedly identical natures could eventuate in different forms of self-interest with often undesirable consequences (Crocker 1959: 279). The

³⁴⁴ Optimistic ideas about the naturalness of the world in which they lived, led the *philosophes* to conceive of man's capacity for action as inevitably resulting in a greater good. As Berman writes, Voltaire "was convinced that the world in which he was so comfortably at home had to be fundamentally beneficent" (Berman 1970: 68).

fact that all human actions are natural served to "expose values to the ambiguity of 'nature,'" because the moral laws on which society seemed to be, often reliably, premised could not easily be sanctioned if they were based on nothing higher or more lasting than the individual's own fickle ego (Crocker 1963: 508-509). This is because if the motivation for every action were to be reduced to self-interest alone, then all actions also essentially became equivalent in value and meaning. The difference between all acts thus became of degree and not of kind, and the question arose of whether there was any room for affective or compassionate actions based on the moral values that seemed to many to be ingrained within the human soul (Crocker 1959: 77). Such a perspective opened the door to nihilism because the space for the exercise of legitimate human freedom was reduced merely to inevitably satisfying one's needs in the most rational way. The equation of self-interest with nature—that the ego was itself the space for the correct operation of the natural world—also amounted to a huge valorization of individuality. And this also ran the risk of encouraging amorality in the form of precluding consideration of the well-being of the rest of the world in the determination of one's own legitimate action (Crocker 1963: 336). As Rousseau would one day write in the *Social Contract*, "it is said that everyone contributes to the public good for his own interest. But what then is the source of the just man's contributing to it to his own prejudice? What is going to one's death for one's interest? No doubt, no one acts for anything other than for his good, but if there is not a moral good which must be taken into account, one will never explain by private interest anything but the action of the wicked. It is not even likely that anyone will attempt to go farther" (Rousseau 1978: 289).

Thus the experience of Western Europeans as the eighteenth century progressed seemed to be increasingly related to what the individualistic philosophy of the *philosophes* necessarily assumed had in itself no actual existence, society. Such a view of human action seemed at odds with what we have seen defined the period, the effects of urbanization, the increasing consciousness of economic inequality and exploitation, the cultivation of national differences, and the visible effect that religion as a human creation seemed to have on the development of culture (Outram 2013: 119). It was becoming clear that the end result of the naked pursuit of self-interest could only be social chaos (Crocker 1963: 255). Yet, for most of the *philosophes*, society continued to be seen as neither constitutive of human identity nor "as essential to human agency." It was precisely society, the social, that the *philosophes* were unable to explain because, in Rousseau's time, it was "not regarded as constitutive of human identity" since an

individual, even in the absence of others, was already presumed naturally to "have a preformed identity, interests, needs and desires, or free will, and a certain capacity for instrumental calculation" (Garrard 2003: 19).

Consequently, the question of how society was to be held together morally and ethically if it were motivated by an individualistic self-interest alone became more pressing (Bloom 1979: 5). And the problem of how to deal with the phenomenon of society was only compounded by European discoveries across the world, which seemed to reveal an undreamed of diversity in human experience that ran completely against the idea of a uniform human subjectivity. Growing European awareness of other cultures in China and the South Seas, which seemed much less self-interested yet paradoxically much more harmonious and stable than that of Europe, ironically, seemed to put into stark relief the question among the intellectual elite of whether it was the nature of European society, whose existence their idealistic worldview effectively denied, that did not itself have a role to play in the crisis of values that seemed to regularly plague the continent (Doyle 1992: 183). In recognition of the growing challenge to the Enlightenment's rabid individualism, it was becoming more obvious that the question of how to account for the "socialization of the egoistic individual" was of paramount importance (Crocker 1963: XIV). And in response to this the *philosophes* lamely fell back on the ancient idea that sociability too was simply a natural characteristic of man's experience. Yet Rousseau's great triumph, as we shall turn to presently, was that he alone of his contemporaries was able to realize that this solution only served to deny what was unique to, and becoming increasingly apparent about, human society, namely that society was not natural and so was infinitely variable, and that the effect of culture on the individual could not be equated to a natural characteristic because society had an emergent quality about it that made the whole of individual actions within it greater than their sum.

Rousseau's Discovery of Society and Critique of Civilization

The real question that both egoism and natural sociability was intended to explain but could not, then, was the structuring effect, the apparent malleability of individuals within diverse societies. It could not contend with the problem of how society could be constitutive of the often seemingly irrational social influences that were becoming increasingly visible in daily life and

the differences observed across cultures that were now apparent to Western Europeans. For these reasons the new and undeniable importance of society fit poorly under the aegis of nature. This was because the idea of natural sociability was a logical fallacy in that it was clearly antithetical to the very thing it was trying to explain.³⁴⁵ Natural sociability was not able to rise above its basis in an individualism sanctioned by nature to explain how human beings could become involved in social actions that did not comport to individualistic behavioural expectations linked to nature.³⁴⁶ At the same time, the increasing recognition of the importance of the social, as something that seemed to be formative of individuality, gave rise to the question among Rousseau's contemporaries of what constituted, or how to reconcile society with, an authentic form of subjectivity (Berman 1970: 312). The complexity of modern life, the falsity, the repression, when juxtaposed with an increasing control over nature that seemed to heighten man's ability to act as an agent, all together had led to a growing and pervasive sense of alienation (Berman 1970: 315).³⁴⁷

It was on the question of society that Rousseau had begun to drift away from his one time friends, the *philosophes*. At a time when knowledge was becoming more of a commodity used to display social status, the disparity between the reception given to ideas of the popular and powerful— even when they were lacking in content or meaning—and those of more modest men such as himself, must have been glaringly obvious. Rousseau's ineptitude at speaking off the cuff, his social anxiety, and his inability to relax around others certainly must have put him at an obvious disadvantage in the company of the greatest wits of the eighteenth century. In the same way he, as a poor boy who had made good, came to realize that the *philosophes* and their elite patrons, as he would later call them those "heaps of idlers paid by the fat of the people to go six times a week to chatter in an academy" (Rousseau 2013: 580; *Letters to Malesherbes* 4), were for the most part entirely oblivious, or rather disinterested, in the role that wealth played in the advancement and development of their own ideas. Rousseau must have begun to resent the fact

³⁴⁵ This is because, as Crocker rightly argues, "to deny the legitimacy or the possibility of transcendence over nature in the field of behaviour is, deliberately or unintentionally, to deny culture" (Crocker 1963: 365).

³⁴⁶ This is what Rousseau meant in the *Social Contract* when he compared the perspective of his contemporaries on the unity of individual actions and motivations in society to a dismemberment trick, writing that "the juggling acts of our political theorists are about like that. After they have taken the social body apart by a trick worthy of a carnival, they put the pieces back together in some way" (Rousseau 1978: 60).

³⁴⁷ Rousseau would force "his contemporaries to acknowledge that the self was a problem as pressing for them as it was for him. In forcing this problem to the surface of consciousness, moreover, he showed how repressive, how profoundly alien to the self the modern world really was" (Berman 1970: 75).

that he, by necessity, had to serve as a secretary to men and women of lesser intelligence, sacrificing the time that he could spend on developing his own thoughts to the projects of others not because theirs were any better, as would have been commensurate with the Enlightenment ideal of the public sphere, but by virtue of their superior social or economic power. He came to see the emphasis on discussion and critique that the Enlightenment had given pride of place to as a sham that only served to perpetuate the very forces that it claimed to oppose.³⁴⁸ Rousseau was beginning to perceive, in other words, "the in-group narcissism of a narrow band of the social spectrum that regarded itself as the world... (unaware of) the social injustice on which its privilege was built" (Damrosch 2007: 164). He was not yet at the point of contemptuously describing the salons as "voluntary prisons," as in his *Letter d'Alembert*, home to a "harem" of "womanish" men (Rousseau 2004: 326). But the longer he remained in Paris with the *philosophes*, the more time he spent in their intellectual culture, thriving on irony and witticism, in its clubs and coffee houses, the longer he resided with these men, like Petrarch, who perceived themselves as more "enlightened" than their contemporaries because of their great learning and grasp of high culture, the more they came to appear to him as shallow and self-serving. With the result that not before long, as Rousseau puts it, he "acquired a disdain for my century and my contemporaries" (Rousseau 2013: 575; *Letters to Malesherbes* 2).

Rousseau had been in Paris for five years after his return from Venice when his frustrations finally came to a head in one serendipitous epiphany while walking to the prison at Vincennes just outside of Paris. He was on his way to visit Diderot, who had been incarcerated for impiety.³⁴⁹ His activity over the past several months, feverishly writing 400 articles on music for the *Encyclopaedia* in the hopes that they would make his name and to meet a deadline, had just ended in frustration when he discovered that he alone of the well-healed authors had bothered to finish the work on time (Zaretsky 2009: 20). Rousseau always claimed that he did his best thinking while he walked and on this occasion he picked up a copy of the intellectual journal the *Mercure de France* to read on the journey. He was now nearing 40, which he later said was the age that he had given himself for either achieving fame or accepting a life of obscurity (Rousseau 1979(2): 31; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walkers* 3rd Promenade). And as

³⁴⁸ And in this he was reflecting the frustrations of an increasing number of the more obscure writers of the Enlightenment, the so called "Grub Street" writers, who had begun to reject salon culture as a mere extension of the disparities of the *ancien régime* (Woloch and Brown 2012: 221).

³⁴⁹ Scholars have proven that the time was October 1749, though he mistakenly remembered it as the summer.

he made his way to the prison, glancing over the pages, he fixed his gaze on an advertisement for a competition sponsored by the Academy de Dijon offering a prize for the best essay on the question "Has the Restoration of the Sciences and the Arts Contributed to the Purification of Morals?" (Rousseau 1997: XIII). On reading this Rousseau relates that he suddenly felt faint, as if another hitherto invisible world had been opened to him, and his mind was deluged by ideas seemingly beyond his direction or initiative.³⁵⁰ Giddy as if drunk he collapsed under a nearby tree and claims that he remained in a trance for the next half-hour as all the "contradictions of the social system" presented themselves to his mind. When the stupor finally passed and he again became aware of his surroundings, he realized that the front of his coat had been soaked with unknowingly shed tears. What insight he could retain of this experience and was capable of describing, he claimed, went on to form the basis of all of his later ideas. He then continued to Vincennes and discussed the competition with Diderot and decided to submit a short essay that took the startling position—much more aligned with the modern view than that which prevailed in his own time—that the development of the arts and sciences have been detrimental to human well-being.

Assuming that the experience was not a fabrication, as Voltaire later speculated,³⁵¹ Rousseau had come to realize on the road to Vincennes something profound and groundbreaking. It was an idea that no one had had before, or at least been able to articulate so effectively, yet one for which everyone was grasping. And it must have seemed, once the idea had struck him, as if all the frustration and disappointment in his life, all the inner turmoil and confusion both about himself and the world, had come together in a single moment of explanation.³⁵² In the face of all the adversity that he had encountered, in the wake of his many personal failures, Rousseau had long felt that men were meant for something better than the anguished and uncertain existence in which they found themselves.³⁵³ As was the case for

³⁵⁰ As he would later describe it, "if anything has ever resembled a sudden inspiration, it is the motion that was caused in me by that reading; suddenly I felt my mind dazzled by a thousand lights; crowds of lively ideas presented themselves at the same time with a strength and a confusion that threw me into an inexpressible perturbation" (Rousseau 2013: 575; *Letters to Malesherbes* 2).

³⁵¹ Diderot even claimed that it was his suggestion and not a moment of sudden inspiration that was the actual spur of the essay topic for the competition (Damrosch 2007: 214).

³⁵² The parallel here to Augustine's conversion in the garden and Petrarch's ascent of Mount Ventoux are obvious, and this experience proved to be no less transformative in its effect on Western civilization.

³⁵³ While a tutor in Lyons he had written a memorandum to his employer on the education of his son, claiming that "nothing is more depressing than the general fate of men. And yet they feel in themselves a consuming desire to

Augustine and Petrarch, in the wake of Rousseau's own conversion experience a sense of uncertainty and awkwardness was replaced with one of mission. He came to see himself as having a purpose, that his life had been the product of a unique conjunction of events that had provided him with a perspective on society perhaps not commonly available, and that he had a duty to share this with other people. He had worked in so many occupations and had associated with men at all levels of status and in as many conditions as was possible for a Western European of his time; "no other member of the intellectual world of his time," as Shklar writes, "had lived like that" (Shklar 1969: 220). And this had allowed Rousseau to feel that he could look beneath the mask, as it were, to see how society really functioned, to discover that all alike in society were driven by the same false needs. This was Rousseau's "breakthrough," as Horowitz calls it, his defining contribution, the realization that human actions could not be adequately examined through an analysis that relied on taking people in an atomized fashion for the simple reason that "individuals are already social beings" (Horowitz 1987: 82).

Following his experience on the road to Vincennes, Rousseau quickly wrote and submitted for the Academy's consideration his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, subsequently more commonly known as the First Discourse.³⁵⁴ Rather than a comprehensive position on man, his attack in this work would be direct and idiosyncratic in its focus on the decadence of civilization. What it put forward consistently and coherently was unique in that it ran against the Enlightenment's optimism about human achievement inherited from Petrarch and his Renaissance followers, through advancing the counterintuitive argument that sophistication, in the sense of intellectual and cultural refinement, has always accompanied the decline and collapse of civilization rather than forestalled it.³⁵⁵ Rousseau begins the discourse by rhetorically praising the accomplishments of the Enlightenment. He then poses what he believes is a novel question, which he would develop in his later philosophy and which is proof of its already nascent form in his thinking: is man capable of facing up to the more difficult task of returning to "himself" (Rousseau 1997: 6).

become happy, and it makes them feel at every moment that they were born to be happy. So why are they not?" (cited in Damrosch 2007: 153).

³⁵⁴ It is the shortest of Rousseau's major works, under 10 000 words, abiding by the maximum length set out under the competition. Its content, as even Rousseau would later point out, is entirely derivative, only briefly touching in various places on what would later become the core tenets of his theory.

³⁵⁵ As he would later write in his *Letter to Raynal* "I cast my thesis in the form of a general proposition: I assigned this first stage in the decadence of morals to the first moment at which letters came to be cultivated in any country of the world, and I found the progress of these two things always to be directly proportioned" (Rousseau 1997: 29).

Proceeding with his argument, Rousseau lays out a fairly generic account of the loss of culture in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, when men "lived in a state worse than ignorance" because, as he would later explain in a response to a critique of the discourse, they foolishly believed that they knew the entirety of the world via Scholastic philosophy. With the Renaissance the arts and sciences returned to Europe to rescue it from this "contemptible" state. However, in the process they merely introduced a new kind of subjugation, not to a blind ignorance but to an illusion of taste that conveyed "the appearances of all the virtues without having a single one" (Rousseau 1997: 7). In ancient times manners were straightforward and the forthrightness of man's intentions could be conveyed at "first glance." But now, under the pressure of uniformity, as owing to the common need to portray themselves as imbued with good taste because of the attachment of the arts and sciences to prestige, all men act, Rousseau claims, as if they were "cast in the same mold" as a "herd" that follow custom but "never one's own genius" (Rousseau 1997: 8). Morality, in others words, declines with the advancement of the arts and sciences, in an effect that Rousseau argues has been "observed at all times and in all places" (Rousseau 1997: 9).³⁵⁶

While Petrarch envisioned himself as a "second Ennius," as we have seen, Rousseau argues that this Roman poet, as with Terrance, Catullus, and Ovid, were not harbingers of Rome's success but were indicative of its decline and fall, something initiated on the "day on which one of its Citizens was given the title of Arbiter of good taste" (Rousseau 1997: 10).³⁵⁷ "How humiliating" to "our pride" must these reflections be, Rousseau concludes, before moving on in the second section of the discourse to examine what it is about the sophistication that the sciences and the arts engender that always causes them to accompany the very undesirable features of human society (Rousseau 1997: 14-15).³⁵⁸ The quality of artistic achievement, Rousseau argues, is lessened as it is used to cater to the vain pursuits and interests of idleness (Rousseau 1997: 19), and military prowess likewise always declines in tandem with the

³⁵⁶ This is because "suspicions, offenses, fears, coolness, reserve, hatred, betrayal, will constantly hide beneath this even and deceitful veil of politeness" and this is especially the case with the "much vaunted urbanity which we owe to the enlightenment of our century" (Rousseau 1997: 8).

³⁵⁷ Rousseau then briefly traces the degeneration of Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Constantinople to demonstrate by way of inference rather than by critical analysis that the study of virtue via philosophy has always accompanied the decline of its actual practice and that it was wisdom that held ultimate responsibility for the demise of those civilizations (Rousseau 1997: 10-13).

³⁵⁸ As he writes, "Without men's injustices, what would be the use of Jurisprudence? What would become of History, if there were neither Tyrants, nor Wars, nor Conspirators?" (Rousseau 1997: 17).

enervation of the body through intellectual preoccupations (Rousseau 1997: 21). The common element that links these two factors, "which gives rise to all of these abuses" (Rousseau 1997: 23), is that the ascendancy of the sciences and the arts are "never found" without luxury, that is to say without the time for speculation or artistic activity, which wealth brings (Rousseau 1997: 18). As wealth grows the sciences and the arts commensurately flourish because they become hallmarks of the idleness that it brings and so are used as a means of defining the rich from the poor. And as a result, as Rousseau writes cleverly referring to the Academy's contest, "there are a thousand prizes for fine discourses, none for fine deeds" (Rousseau 1997: 23). Luxury and inequality cause the breakdown of the social order and a decrease in concern for the well-being of the whole community.³⁵⁹

The writings of the philosophers, then, are not harmless, even if they themselves do no harm directly, because their vacuous speculation "spoils the minds of his fellow-citizens?" (Rousseau 1997: 45-46). While the *philosophes* portray the eighteenth century as a time of progress as owing to the benefits incurred from the sciences and the arts, Rousseau asserts that his diatribe against them should leave the reader in "no doubt" that they would do better to pray to God to be delivered from "Enlightenment and fatal arts" and restored "to ignorance, innocence, and poverty, the only goods that can make for our happiness" and so gain a true understanding of the role of "that Crowd of Popularizers who have removed the difficulties which guarded the access to the Temple of the Muses" (Rousseau 1997: 26). Men must understand against the critical spirit of the Enlightenment that the great barriers to the accumulation of knowledge created by nature are a means of protecting man against a learning that is ultimately not in his favour (Rousseau 1997: 14). In this light, Rousseau concludes his discourse by drawing a distinction between the human ideal of simplicity that he sets out and the men who find immortality in the "Republic of Letters"—with Petrarch of course, although unnamed, being the archetypal example—arguing "that the one knew how to speak well, and the other, to act well" (Rousseau 1997: 28).

In July 1750 Rousseau learned that he had won the competition. The Academy was very conservative and had missed the whole point of the essay, interpreting it as attack on the secularization of the Enlightenment rather than as a comprehensive attack on civilization

³⁵⁹ For these reasons, Rousseau argues, the politicians of his own day should "suspend their calculations" when they assert that the competition between nations for wealth is of pre-eminent import in deciding their relative power (Rousseau 1997: 18-19).

(Damrosch 2007: 214). But whatever their motivations, the notoriety that it would achieve rendered the reason for their decision irrelevant. And from the viewpoint of the reading public, perhaps the greatest fascination that the essay held was in the identity of its author. While Rousseau was at that time a fairly marginal figure of the Enlightenment, he was nonetheless at its very center. The Discourse would have been much less striking in its effect had it been written by a Jansenist or a Jesuit, but for a man well acquainted with the leaders of the *philosophe* movement to hold opinions such as these was completely unexpected. To Rousseau's misfortune, though, news of his success was accompanied by the re-aggravation of a urinary complaint that he had allegedly had in childhood and that would only worsen as his fame grew immensely over the coming decade and a half.³⁶⁰ Since Rousseau was bed-ridden Diderot took it upon himself to get the Discourse printed, and the result was a public reception beyond anyone's expectations. "It is taking on like wildfire... There has never been a success like it," were the words Diderot used, Rousseau recounts, to describe its public reception (Rousseau 1954: 338-339). To an intellectual culture that equated sophistication with humanity, the Discourse came as something distinct and wholly original.³⁶¹

The discourse's immense success, along with his ability to anticipate and refute the criticisms levelled against it, gave Rousseau the "first real assurance of my talents, which despite my inner convictions, I had always been doubtful" (Rousseau 1954: 339). And now emboldened, he felt for the first time as if he "had courage" and so resolved to live a simpler life reflective of the intellectual positions that he had put forward (Rousseau 1979(2): 33; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 3rd Promenade).³⁶² Rousseau quit his job as secretary, now no longer to Mme Dupin but to her nephew M. de Francueil, and returned to the least complicated occupation of which he felt himself capable, that of copying music (Rousseau 1979(2): 31; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 3rd Promenade).³⁶³ But all of these personal reforms had the

³⁶⁰ He would only find relief from this through the use of catheters, which likely greatly exacerbated the problem. However, while he attributed his condition to a deformation of the bladder and the effect of hot weather on his kidneys, it is hard not to see this as a symptom of his long-running hypochondria, this time as tied to a fear of success.

³⁶¹ It would take two years for Rousseau to respond to the best of the replies to his Discourse, with many coming from the most well-read men in Europe, including even the King of Poland, Stanislaus (Butterworth 1979: XIV).

³⁶² His desire here was to renounce the means that men use to distinguish themselves through objects in favour of the elevation of values and personality (Butterworth 1979: 172).

³⁶³ He also changed his dress replacing "gold lace and white stocking" with a more sombre black attire, substituting his powdered wig for a much plainer round one. He also gave up the wearing of a sword and, to his greatest delight, a watch (Rousseau 1954: 339).

opposite of the desired effect. His reclusiveness when combined with the eccentricity of his ideas only served to increase his celebrity, with the result that he became one of the most famous men in Paris (Rousseau 1954: 342).

In 1754 Rousseau's interest was spurred by another essay competition sponsored by the Academy of Dijon, which asked "What is the origin of inequality among men, and whether it is authorized by the natural Law" (Rousseau 1997: 129). This time, in setting out to answer the question, Rousseau failed to respect the maximum length specified for submissions, and so his essay was rejected out of hand. Yet he went on to publish the work the following year and it caused just as much of a sensation as had the First Discourse. Against detractors who attributed his earlier success to luck, novelty, or fleeting inspiration, Rousseau would show himself with this work to be not just a celebrity but one of Europe's greatest thinkers. He would flush out the implications of his conversion experience, the insights that he had been ruminating on, by squarely placing the blame for all of man's ills on society through reaching back to a primordial time to explain its emergence. As he would later claim in his *Letter to Beaumont*, he observed men and "seeing that their actions bore little resemblance to their speeches, I sought the reason for this dissimilarity... I found it in our social order... and saw that by itself it explained all the vices of men and all the ills of society" (Rousseau 2013(2): 52; *Letter to Beaumont*).³⁶⁴

The State of Nature

In the Second Discourse more commonly known as the Discourse on Inequality, the full title is the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* or the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, Rousseau would build on his valorization of simplicity and attack on civilization by trying to envision man in the state at which he was closest to the animals. By laying out this "State of Nature," by going back to the origin, as was so common in the naturalistic theories of his time, he would find a sure foundation on which to examine why the structure of society made it inherently the root of all of man's

³⁶⁴ And as if to give his critics a further injury he dedicated, against the *philosophes'* ideal of cosmopolitanism, the *Discourse on Inequality*, or the Second Discourse, to his birthplace of Geneva, writing that of all the states in Europe it alone enjoyed a political and social structure "most closely approximating natural law and most favourable to society, to the preservation of public order and to the happiness of individuals" (Rousseau 1997: 114).

misery.³⁶⁵ In the Preface Rousseau compares humanity to the mythological Statue of Glaucus, weathered not by the elements but "in the lap of society" and so altered beyond all recognition from its original form (Rousseau 1997: 124).³⁶⁶ The problem is compounded, he continues, in a very original way, one that, as we shall see, is indicative of his entire theory, in that the very act of studying man removes him "ever farther from its primitive state" because man's consciousness is itself a social product (Rousseau 1997: 124).³⁶⁷ Given that Rousseau cannot trust contemporary ideas of what man is, with all their self-serving deceptions and modifications to man's nature, it was necessary for him to take an intuitive leap to a hypothetical state in the past, as he writes, "which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist, which probably never will exist" but against which man's current degeneration could be compared and so elucidated (Rousseau 1997: 125). While other philosophers had, therefore, tried to establish natural laws for man simply "by looking for the rules about which it would be appropriate for men to agree among themselves for the sake of common utility," Rousseau's examination would be novel because it would not "make a Philosopher of man before making a man of him" (Rousseau 1997: 127).³⁶⁸

Rousseau thus differentiates between an inequality rooted in natural characteristics, such as age or strength, which are self-evident and not worthy of consideration, and ones that are moral or political, whose origin lies in the "the moment when Right replacing Violence, Nature was subjected to Law" (Rousseau 1997: 131).³⁶⁹ If society is at the root of much of what currently defines man, as Rousseau intuitively believes, the task must be to elucidate how man existed prior to his becoming what we now consider to be a man, when he lived, in other words, just like the animals (Rousseau 1997: 134). Drawing on Locke's epistemology, Rousseau

³⁶⁵ But Rousseau's discussion of the State of Nature would have little in common with depictions of the noble savage as prominent in European literature at this time (Melzer 1990: 55) or with the belief of some natural philosophers that man's natural state could be deduced empirically (Grimsley 1983: 26). Rousseau also, unlike his contemporaries, did not believe that any contemporary human grouping remained in an original natural state.

³⁶⁶ Rousseau takes the Glaucus example from Plato's discussion of the soul in Book X of the Republic.

³⁶⁷ To really understand man, then, as Rousseau writes in the exordium to the Discourse, one cannot look "in the Books by your kind, who are liars, but in nature, which never lies" (Rousseau 1997: 133).

³⁶⁸ For Rousseau the aggression and selfishness that characterized modern society was not the simply overflow of self-activity (Berman 1970: 135). Rather it was a form of self-alienation. "The history of man's self-development was simultaneously a history of his self-alienation" (Berman 1970: 150). The fixation on self-interest did not arise from nature but rather from its opposite, "from a social system in which everyone was a threat to everyone else. Beneath a surface of benevolence, frightful aggressions seethed in modern man's mind" (Berman 1970: 133).

³⁶⁹ And this moment's point of origin lies in man's departure from the State of Nature, the characteristics of which, Rousseau argues, all philosophers prior to himself have failed to understand. In seeking to understand the State of Nature, Rousseau proposes not merely to examine what all men share or what is most basic to them as we now know them to be but to go beyond this line of inquiry.

speculates that man in the State of Nature, when separated from everything developmental in his character, was a creature of pure sensation (Rousseau 1997: 161). He lived in an immediacy in that his wants did not extend beyond the satisfaction of the needs of his body.³⁷⁰ All of his desires were focused on one thing alone, which he shared with all other sentient beings, and what Rousseau, following a term coined by the Swiss religious writer Jakob Abbadie, called *amour de soi*, a passive love of self that did not extend beyond an urge to live but merely encompassed the desire to preserve one's own life (Crocker 1963: 139).³⁷¹

Man in this state was not aware of the existence of other human beings; he saw them merely as another variable to measure his needs against; he cared only for food, procreation, and rest, and only feared pain and hunger (Rousseau 1997: 142). This is because other men would conceivably provide a challenging source of food for a creature who only thinks of his bodily needs, since no creature hunts its own in nature, and given that nature's abundance would provide much better alternatives to the food source of man. If natural man were to find himself in competition with other people for food or for whatever else, he would likewise find it easier to simply move on to another area, since anything possessed by other men that he would seek could be much more easily obtained not from them but from the source itself. Man in the state of nature then would live an entirely solitary life, only interrupted by the promiscuity of nature "any woman suits him."³⁷² Unable to communicate to others, and having nothing to say, natural man would think only of the present. He would not communicate his needs because he would not be aware that others share them; his mind would extend only to the satisfaction of the immediate, with no concept of the future; and he would be governed by objectives that "hardly extend to the close of day" (Rousseau 1997: 143).³⁷³ From all of this Rousseau concludes, and believes he refutes, the Enlightenment view that sociability is simply something natural and innate (Rousseau 1997: 149).

³⁷⁰ As Rousseau writes of natural man, "I see him sating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first Stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied" (Rousseau 1997: 134).

³⁷¹ The State of Nature is for this reason really a pre-human state because man in this condition is not yet the creator of his own life, and as such possesses nothing when compared to the animals beyond the superficial appearance of a physical form that defines him as being a man (Shklar 1969: 10).

³⁷² This also would not be problematic in the sense that it would provoke conflict since, as opposed to what is the case for many other species, the ratio of males and females in nature appears to be practically equal (Rousseau 1997: 155).

³⁷³ Moreover, without any ability to communicate with other beings, if such a man were somehow to make a discovery, "the art," as Rousseau phrases it, "perished with the inventor" (Rousseau 1997: 157).

In the State of Nature, man's activity would be self-centered but also entirely passive in the sense that natural man would not perceive himself to be the ruler of the universe, again because in the immediacy of his existence he would not even be able to conceive of the universe. And in this way Rousseau argues that Hobbes "improperly included in Savage man's care for his preservation the need to satisfy a multitude of passions that are the product of Society and have made Laws necessary" (Rousseau 1997: 151). Hobbes, in other words, retrospectively transposed modern qualities into the State of Nature where they had no business being, oblivious to the fact that these qualities, as we shall see shortly, were themselves a product of the very society that they sought to explain. And so man in the State of Nature lives out his life in a more or less stable equilibrium. Having an interest only in the satisfaction of his immediate desires and in avoiding pain, his actions are never gratuitous. He does not kill when he has no need to; he does not fight out of pride but only for survival; he never feels the contempt or condemnation of others, not even knowing what they are; and so has no need to appear, through his actions, to be something more than what he is (Rousseau 1997: 154). His imagination is not yet capable of conceiving anything that it cannot have, and so he is never disappointed. And if he does experience some regret over, for example, the loss of a food source, it is transitory and extends only so far as the next satisfaction of this need. For the same reason natural man experiences no remorse because he has no conception that the world could have been anything other than what it is. Everything for man is merely what it appears to him to be; it is an extension of his body and nothing more than this. His desires are commensurate with his needs, and his needs with his desires. His conception of reality is never disproved because he has no notion of anything beyond his bodily associations, whose satisfaction is straightforward and, in a manner of speaking, black and white. The world is something to satisfy hunger or not, to mate with or not, to sleep on or not, and while man's life may come to a violent and brutish end, this, when it arrives, is mercifully swift and, moreover, not expected and so not feared. And this is why Rousseau, against theories of original sin or innate selfishness, claims that man is naturally "good." Not in the moral sense of good as the opposite of evil, but in that his actions originally lacked any distinction between good and evil. They were simply all that they could be given his reliance on sensation, and also benign because when directed against other beings, always confined to, and warranted by, what was required for survival. Natural man, since he is unaware

of the existence of others, is also basically equal to them. His relationships are with things rather than with people (Grimsley 1973: 35).³⁷⁴

Man in the State of Nature would be a creature without understanding.³⁷⁵ Yet natural man, while completely oblivious to what we in society deem to be important, would be more than just this. Though from our perspective his life would be one of ignorance, he would actually literally be at peace with himself and with his world given that there would be nothing to exceed his understanding and so cause him misery.³⁷⁶ This is because, beyond the awareness that the external world exists, what in our own feeble and unreliable understanding could not be equated with an ignorance perhaps even worse than that of the animal in the sensory immediacy that Rousseau described? What more could a creature want, then, even one such as modern man who might know better, but to have the absolutely happy life free from doubt and uncertainty that man once enjoyed in the State of Nature?³⁷⁷ Since man's thought in the State of Nature would simply be commensurate with the demands of his own body, his life would be without what this work has termed otherness, both in the sense of a primordial recognition of an external world and in that of the awareness of the limitations of human thought about that world. There would be, "a perfect identity of subject and object, because subject and object do not yet exist" (Horowitz 1987: 69). Clearly all of this is very much in line with Augustine's version of what man's paradisiacal existence was like in the Garden of Eden, a life without anxiety or contradiction. In a word, a perfect life consistent with the perfection that Rousseau perceived in the operation of nature.

³⁷⁴ Yet Rousseau maintains that man in this state, prior to his corruption by civilization—with his body well developed, given that he would entirely rely on it, and with his ability to run, climb, and grasp—would be more than a match for any of the beasts. And as proof of this he states that no animal "naturally wars against man," as is the case with other species governed by relations of predator and prey (Rousseau 1997: 136).

³⁷⁵ As Vaughan writes, "Our whole happiness would consist in not knowing our misery" (Vaughan 1960: Vol. 1, 27).

³⁷⁶ "Man's horizons in the State of Nature are limited, and he lives in an equilibrium that does not yet bring him into conflict with either the world or himself. He does not work (which would involve him in conflict with nature), nor does he reflect (which would involve him in conflict with himself and his peers)" (Starobinski 1988: 25).

³⁷⁷ This is the reason why Rousseau asserts, very much against the Enlightenment's valorization of reason, that "if it destined us to be healthy... I almost dare assert, the state of reflection is a state against Nature, and the man who meditates is a depraved animal" (Rousseau 1997: 137-138).

The Fall of Man and the Social

If man's life in his natural state was as free from error as Rousseau posits, the question remains of what possible incentive could have induced him to leave this mode of existence for one that seems to entail so much suffering. To answer this question, though, we must first examine how man had the physical ability to leave his natural condition. Rousseau argues in the Second Discourse that, in the first place, man can make use of his body in ways whose malleability distinguishes him from other creatures. As he writes, man can "put his limbs to new uses" (Rousseau 1997: 134), and as proof of this he goes on to say that savage man puts his body "to various uses of which our bodies are incapable for want of practice" (Rousseau 1997: 135). At the same time man possesses distinct physical attributes that presage his later existence as a social being capable of building a world rather than simply living within the bounds of what nature proscribes "walking on two feet, using his hands as we do ours, directing his gaze over the whole of Nature, and with his eyes surveying the vast expanse of Heaven" (Rousseau 1997: 134). That is to say that man's physical characteristics, the fact that he is bipedal, that he does not look at the ground as he walks, and that he has the ability to manipulate objects very effectively with his hands, make him uniquely suited to living a social life. Interestingly, Augustine also pointed out the importance of these characteristics but claimed that they were evidence of man's distinct ability to worship God, just as Petrarch saw them as a validation of an autonomous subjectivity.

Man can use his physical capacities in new ways because he possesses two attributes that are practically dormant, or expressed very differently, in the State of Nature. Although they both operate internally within the human being himself, Rousseau argues that their nature makes them non-material, "purely spiritual acts about which nothing is explained by the Laws of Mechanics" (Rousseau 1997: 141). The first of these qualities Rousseau terms "perfectibility," which refers to man's ability for self-improvement through the use of what Augustine would have called the will (Rousseau 1997: 141). It allows for the relationship between man's physical being and the habits that he acquires through living with others to function in a dynamic and complementary fashion, enabling him to change the use that he makes of his own physical form in response to social conditions. Perfectibility enables man to escape from the animal's subjection to the forces of nature, which render every other creature nothing but an "ingenious machine" wholly lacking

in dynamism, self-explanatory, and so incapable of deviating from the "Rule prescribed" by nature (Rousseau 1997: 140).³⁷⁸ Man is a free agent because he can improve himself through volition in a way unavailable to the animals. He can choose to resist or cooperate with his own physicality and with the material world, he can "contribute to his operations," in a way that allows him to perfect himself and his activities (Rousseau 1997: 140). The second spiritual attribute unique to man is what Rousseau terms "natural pity." Pity is a disposition present in human beings and, in exceptional cases, even in other creatures that produces a natural repugnance within the self to the suffering of other beings and especially to the suffering of members of one's own species (Rousseau 1997: 152). Rousseau speculates that pity's original purpose in the State of Nature was to act as a means of contributing to the preservation of nature as a whole by moderating the human desire for self-preservation given man's advantages over the animals (Rousseau 1997: 154). In the State of Nature, then, pity was complementary to self-preservation in that it kept wantonness in check; it allowed for the maintenance of a stable equilibrium in nature in the absence of any kind of rules to govern human behaviour beyond those of nature itself. Overall, it could be said that while the role of perfectibility in Rousseau's theory explains man's creative power, pity is the faculty that presages and enables the expansive quality of human thought in man's ability to extend his mind beyond the confines of the body and its sensation.

But these unique attributes, even if natural, could only have resulted in man leaving the State of Nature if they were triggered by conditions that forced him to live in such a way as to facilitate their expression in ways not originally found in nature (Grimsley 1973: 36). At the beginning of the Second Part of the Second Discourse, Rousseau speculates that the spread of the human race across the globe, and the new challenges encountered under the pressure to adapt to new climates, could have "engendered in man's mind perceptions of certain relations," meaning comparisons between things that, for the first time, would have drawn man beyond his isolation in the sensory dependence of his body and made him aware of otherness, that is to say of the existence of the external world (Rousseau 1997: 162). A cognizance of these relations would conceivably have first and foremost taken the form of man's comparison of his own physical being and activity to that of the animals (Rousseau 1997: 162). Early man's ability to compare

³⁷⁸ It is for this reason that the lives of the "beasts," Rousseau asserts, are "after a thousand years what it was in the first year of those thousand" but to man alone is given the power to improve upon his animal state (Rousseau 1997: 141).

himself to other creatures would, by understanding and so predicting their behaviour, have allowed him to control them in a way previously unavailable. "He tricked them in a thousand ways... in time he became the master of those that could be harmful to him" (Rousseau 1997: 162). Rousseau argues, like Augustine, that the result of man's separation from nature, of otherness, was a new belief in his superiority, in that he now began to feel pride in himself as being different and above the others. This is because the act of comparison, relying on a distinction between self and other, in Rousseau's view, always leads to an evaluation of the worth of the self by measuring it against the worth of the other.

But in addition to the emergence of pride, another related factor also came into play, presumably almost immediately, as a result of the initial recognition of his difference from the animals. This was man's first awareness that there are other creatures in existence with similar abilities to himself and that he exists, therefore, not just as an individual in isolation but as a member of a species. It is this realization that constitutes the nascent stirrings of the all-important discovery of society. And indeed, it is hard to foresee how man could have gotten beyond his initial isolation in the immediacy of his sensations in his natural state to realize that he was a member of the human race without providing that he could first recognize the difference between human beings and other creatures.³⁷⁹ The key thing here is that it is society and not so much an awareness of externality as such, in the sense of the existence of nature as distinct from the self, that was truly at the root of otherness for Rousseau. As he writes, "considering himself in the first ranks as a species, he was from afar preparing to claim first rank as an individual" (Rousseau 1997: 162). This is because at this stage man was only aware of himself as a being distinct from that which was around him. He objectified the world, but was not alienated from it. He did not yet measure the worth of his being by the inventions of his mind. Alienation could only really get started, according to Rousseau's theory, when man began to live with other people.

In the Second Discourse Rousseau presents the first societies as emerging when the improvements in material well-being brought about through man's new-found control of nature enabled the transitory sexual and maternal relations existing in the State of Nature to be transformed into a more stable form of family life. Men and women now remained together long

³⁷⁹ In my view, Rousseau's argument about man's recognition of his distinction from the animals is merely a convenient tool to explain the emergence of society, since there is no other way to envision how the self's awareness of his likeness to others could have occurred without it.

after the occurrence of the sexual act, and thus a division of labour arose within the family unit that provided more leisure and stability than had previously been the case.³⁸⁰ But the first familial bonds also gave rise to the emergence of "the sweetest sentiments known to man," as people now perceived themselves as children and parents whereas before they had only an awareness of the other as a sort of object (Rousseau 1997: 164). The positive feelings obtained through these associations further stimulated the desire to remain together in groups over multiple generations, and so "each family became a small Society" (Rousseau 1997: 164). And as people gathered together in the more stable groupings of primordial society, so occurred the first displacement of the benign self-absorption, *amour de soi*, found in the State of Nature, for a self-love or self-regard obtained through comparison of the self to others, *amour-propre*. As Rousseau writes, "everyone began to look at everyone else and to wish to be looked at himself, and public esteem acquired a price. The one who sang or danced best; the handsomest, the strongest, the most skilful, or the most eloquent came to be the most highly regarded" (Rousseau 1997: 166). These comparisons caused man to separate himself from his actual sensuous experience of being alive, to become alienated from his feelings and emotions, from satisfying his true needs, by attaching himself to inauthentic needs that were nothing more than attempts to satisfy the demands of socially constructed abstractions such as strong, intelligent, beautiful, and so on, which, as the products of the relations between individuals rather than of subjective achievement, had no existence in the actual sense.³⁸¹

Initially, though, the negative effect of these comparisons was fairly minimal because man's needs were simple and could mostly be met through an individual's own labour. Man at this point had little need to affect to have these qualities to win the good-will or support of others because he was not yet dependant on them for his survival. Also, this state of self-sufficiency meant that there was little in the way of conflict between men. This was the Golden Age of primitive simplicity for Rousseau, probably "the happiest period" of man's history (Grimsley

³⁸⁰ So began man's subservience to things. As Rousseau writes, "these conveniences, by becoming habitual, had almost entirely ceased to be enjoyable... it became much more cruel to be deprived of them than to possess them was sweet, and men were unhappy to lose them without being happy to possess them" (Rousseau 1997: 165).

³⁸¹ "Modern men were divided against themselves... their sensitivity and imagination, their thought and action, all were abstracted from the feelings and needs of the self, and directed instead toward the ends which the marketplace imposed" (Berman 1970: 173).

1983: 30), perhaps akin to the noble savage myth in European literature at the time.³⁸² But this idyllic state was not to last. The appearance of metallurgy and agriculture brought with it the first interdependence between men: "as soon as men were needed to melt and forge iron, others were needed to feed them" (Rousseau 1997: 169).³⁸³ Whatever the cause, the effect of interdependence was disastrous, in Rousseau's opinion, because as soon as "one man needed the help of another, inequality appeared, property appeared, work became necessary" (Rousseau 1997: 167).³⁸⁴

With the emergence of interdependence, life became much more complex. People now had to use their minds and bodies in new ways, and soon the more ingenious were able to do more with the same tools than their peers, the stronger able to work harder (Rousseau 1997: 170). Unequal relationships were formed on the basis of the previously unimportant natural inequality that exists between individuals. The dispossessed had no choice but to seek the patronage of the elite, and the power of the well-off depended on their ability to control the poor so that even they "omit nothing servile in order to command" (Rousseau 1979(2): 84; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 6th Promenade).³⁸⁵ And so it was with the emergence of property that the distinguishing feature of modern society, present before but not essential to man's self-perception or survival, now revealed itself and became a permanent characteristic of human life, the need for man to appear to be something other than what he in fact was. As man became dependant on others for survival, and as more of what characterized his life was derived from others, he needed to appear to have qualities by which he could distinguish himself from his peers. Again this became necessary because man could now not survive on his own and because what was deemed desirable could only be obtained through the assistance of other

³⁸² In this state, man transcended the passive ignorance of the beasts deprived of both familial love and the spiritual feeling gained through an awareness of the external world, yet had not succumbed to the inauthentic existence of civilized man whose life is riddled with fear and contradiction (Grimsley 1973: 37-38).

³⁸³ In the Second Discourse Rousseau presents this as resulting from a gradual progression of technology, while in the Social Contract he speculates that scarcity and accompanying overpopulation could have impelled man to develop new techniques of feeding himself to preserve his life.

³⁸⁴ The need to prepare the soil in agriculture for the next year's planting lead to the notion that the cultivator of the land owned the soil (Rousseau 1997: 169). The first man to whom it occurred to act on this by enclosing a piece of ground and to claim it as his own, Rousseau famously wrote, was "the true founder of civil society," and from his actions followed countless "crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors" (Rousseau 1997: 161).

³⁸⁵ Rousseau is demonstrating here, in a way that would be imitated by Hegel, that even the power to dominate another is a self-contradictory one, since it in turn entails its own kind of enslavement (Melzer 1990: 74).

people.³⁸⁶ The only qualities man possesses in such a situation capable of attracting the consideration or good will of others, or that are moreover even intelligible to others, are those gained through the comparison of the self to one's fellows. And what is essential to realize here is that with this, Rousseau, contra Petrarch and the *philosophes*, has made the remarkable, "entirely original," discovery that everything that we identify with individuality in the modern sense is itself a social product—that to conceive of the individual in the absence of these comparative terms, as Vaughan writes in a thought provoking passage, "as apart from a given society, a given community, is, in truth, a plain impossibility. If we attempt the task, we shall find that, in the last resort, we are defining him by a mere string of negatives, which offer nothing definite for the understanding to lay hold of. It is as a member of a community that we know the individual, and as that alone" (Vaughan 1960: Vol. 1, 55).

And because these associations were comparative they implicitly relied on inequality. People had not to possess what was now deemed important for anyone to be capable of possessing them at all. There had to be weakness if there could be strength, or poverty if there were to be riches. Even happiness now became something immoral and negative, not dependent on an inner feeling but on the actual misery of others (Rousseau 1997: 184). And as with Hobbes' depiction of the nature of power, because their nature was comparative, their possession could also never be assured. Thus whenever one party had more of what was deemed to be a good thing, all the other parties automatically had less. And so the former now had to try to defend his position while the latter needed to try harder to appear to have the qualities valorized by society and to attempt in turn to deprive others of this quality, and so on and so forth in a vicious and limitless cycle, because not grounded in anything other than intangible comparisons (Garrard 2003: 52). The implication of this is also that it is only the appearance of having these positive qualities that is important because they are in fact nothing but appearance, lacking any real substance, being the mere product of comparison. As he writes, "to be and to appear became two entirely different things, and from the distinction arose ostentatious display, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their wake" (Rousseau 1997: 170).

While in the State of Nature man was entirely constituted by his own being, his emotions were his own, his instincts and drives pertained to things that he actually wanted. Social man, in

³⁸⁶ "He needs their help, and moderate means do not enable him to do without them. He must therefore constantly try to interest them in his fate and to make them really or apparently find their own profit in working for his" (Rousseau 1997: 170).

contrast, has been conditioned so effectively, so deeply, by living with others that he no longer is aware that what he desires has ceased to derive from his own inclinations (Melzer 1990: 76). He had now to appear to be one of his products, as it were, rather than as himself, and this means that he has no real existence. He lives only vicariously through his creations, and in a very real sense this constitutes Rousseau's discovery of reification. In this way men came to live in the opinions of others and so lost their own identities. It is for this reason that for Rousseau the comparative associations on which social man entirely bases his life are not in themselves capable of being used in a good or a bad way *per se*, but are intrinsically harmful and false because they are without substance, mere illusions that led man down a false path.³⁸⁷

Social man believes that in basing himself on these things he actually lives, but in fact his subservience to them renders his life not only angst ridden and unsatisfactory, but his actual experience as it came to be based entirely on these things, for all intents and purposes, nothing. As Rousseau writes, using a term familiar to the other figures in this work, "He will be good neither for himself nor for others... He will be one of those men of our days: a Frenchman, an Englishman, a bourgeois. He will be nothing" (Rousseau 1979: 40). The individual now had to act the part through a self-conscious role playing and could never simply be himself. Indeed so immersed as they are within the obfuscations of society, modern man would not even be able to recognize his real self. Moreover, social man, essentially, forfeits his ability to will, his distinctive human attribute, because as Rousseau would later write in *Emile*, "as soon as we must see with the eyes of others, one must will with their wills" (Rousseau 1979: 84). In contrast to the Enlightenment and Petrarch's elevation of the self then, modern man, Rousseau argues, is a creature without individuality. Though he does not know it, his life is an entirely derivative one. He spends it merely going through the motions of what has been decided for him by forces beyond his control or understanding (Grimsley 1973: 23). Such a man also constantly looks outside himself for that which can only be found through being true to his own subjectivity, a state of contradiction that eliminates the possibility of ever finding contentment.

³⁸⁷ "Esteem and benevolence constitute a social bond in which men relate to one another immediately: nothing comes between one mind and another, each individual is fully and spontaneously open to the other. By contrast, the bonds of private interest have lost this characteristic immediacy. No longer is there a direct connection of mind to mind: the relationship now involved the mediation of things. The resulting perversion stems not merely from the fact that things come between minds but also from the fact that men no longer identify their interest with their personal existence but instead with mediating objects, which they believe to be indispensable to their happiness. Social man no longer seeks his being within himself but outside, among things; his means become his end. Mankind as a whole becomes a thing, or the slave of things" (Starobinski 1988: 23).

And increased social dependence did mean that man was now not just at the mercy of other men, but that, essentially, he was also prey to the workings of the natural world in ways that he had not been before. This is best illustrated by Rousseau's famed *Letter to Voltaire*, of August 18, 1756, in which he describes the effects of the Lisbon earthquake and attributes its incredible damage not to the workings of nature but to society itself. As he writes,

"you must admit, for example, that nature had not assembled two thousand six-or seven-story houses there, and that if the inhabitants of that great city had been more evenly dispersed and more simply lodged, the damage would have been far less, and perhaps nil. All would have been seen twenty miles away, just as cheerful as if nothing had happened; but they were set on staying, on stubbornly standing by hovels, on risking further shocks, because what they would have left behind was worth more than what they could take with them. How many unfortunates perished in this disaster for wanting to take, one his clothes, another his papers, a third his money? Does not everyone know that a man's person has become his least part, and that it is almost not worth the trouble to save when he has lost everything else?" (Rousseau 1997: 234).

In the same vein, Rousseau will later comment in *Emile* that in civilization even the breath of men is dangerous to other men, meaning that it is society and not nature that is responsible for infectious disease (Rousseau 1979: 59). Rousseau also posits that nature can only be seen by social man for how it serves his purposes, that is, what it does for him rather than what it actually is. The knowledge of the natural world that the Enlightenment prized so highly, in this conception, is revealed to be completely unreliable. It is spoiled because it is necessarily implicated in a self-interested system of inequality that renders nothing what it seems and which, in its need to maintain itself through deceptions and other artificialities, is capable of grasping nature only in relation to the needs of social man rather than in relation to itself. Man's reason therefore, as corrupted by society, acts not as the entry point to understanding nature but as a sort of impenetrable veil covering the workings of the natural world.³⁸⁸ Enlightened man, the man of society, in his self-centered relationship to nature, has the narrowness to view it only as an extension of himself. He foolishly believes that in knowing the part of nature that interests

³⁸⁸ As he sarcastically writes again of Lisbon in his *Letter to Voltaire*, "can there be any doubt that there also are quakes in wilderness? But we do not talk about them, because they do no harm to City Gentlemen" (Rousseau 1997: 234).

him he knows it as it is. He has the audacity to forget that he is a mere part of nature in the expectation that it must conform to his science. As Rousseau continues, he comes to believe through his corruption in society "that the order of the world has to change according to our whims, that nature has to be subjugated to our laws, and that all we need do in order to forbid it an earthquake in a given place is to build a City there?" (Rousseau 1997: 234). Remarks such as these illustrate that Rousseau was thinking on an entirely novel level from his contemporaries about the degree to which man impacts his own experience of every aspect of the world in which he lives.

Rousseau's analysis of the effects of society was thus a landmark in Western thought. Moreover, like all great theories, once expressed it appeared to many as something self-evident, as the obvious source of man's problems, which for some inexplicable reason had until that time gone completely unnoticed.³⁸⁹ He discovered that society, no matter how powerful any attempt by the human will to oppose it, acts behind man's back pulling the strings to produce effects harmful to his existence and antagonistic to his very selfhood. This conception gives society, even if it is undeniably a human creation, an autonomy from man himself. Though it is a product of his individual actions, it cannot be traced to any of them individually and it acts upon him in a uniform way no matter what he does or where or when he lives. Rousseau allotted to society itself, then, a kind of agency, something only thought prior to his time, at least in the European context, to be within the purview of either God or the individual human being. And this perspective would clearly exercise enormous influence on all who followed in Rousseau's wake because it definitively shifted the locus of consideration from Petrarch's man, as an individual above the world, to social man incontrovertibly living with and dependent on others. After Rousseau men would turn to the operation of society to understand their own actions and their relationship to the world. Men were not simply self-righteously warring against fate or chaos, as in Petrarch's notion of man. They now had to reckon with the way in which they were influenced by a force, against which their individuality had no influence.

In sum, society for Rousseau was not just a human institution but occupied a place analogous to philistinism in Petrarch's view, or the disobedience of original sin in Augustine's. It was at the root of otherness, and of man's separation from nature, other human beings, and his

³⁸⁹ As Melzer writes, "one is struck by the radical simplicity of Rousseau's claim. How could needing and helping others, the most elemental social phenomenon, be the root of all human evil?" (Melzer 1990: 71).

own authentic self. As he aptly concludes in the penultimate paragraph of the Second Discourse, "it is enough for me to have proved that this is not man's original state, and that it is only the spirit of Society, together with the inequality society engenders, that changes and corrupts all our natural inclinations" (Rousseau 1997: 187). This is both in terms of the creation of society as the catalyst for the loss of man's harmony with his own existence in the State of Nature, and with the perpetuation of the negative effects of this by virtue of its structure. While not rejecting it completely, Rousseau shows in the Second Discourse that the Enlightenment's naturalism was unable to explain what was actually distinct about man's actions when compared to the rest of nature. Naturalism was clearly unable to account for the characteristics of human life that seem to go against, interfere, or not be aligned to the rest of nature and the human self-perception of having an identity distinct from the rest of the world. In other words, it seemed unable to account for the effect of culture or society itself, and this contradiction made plain that its attempts to make society and its cultural expression simply into another natural characteristic were fruitless (Shklar 1969: 40). It could only focus on the individual—on what takes place within him because of his nature—rather than on social forces that in their operation seem to have a sort of autonomy from the subject because they act upon him even against his will or irrespective of his "nature."

While the *philosophes* "took human sociability for granted," Rousseau wanted to examine what society was, namely how it was constructed and destroyed through the "atomizing forces of *amour-propre*" (Garrard 2003: 7).³⁹⁰ He was the first to reveal that living according to nature and individualism were in their actual operation very different from what his contemporaries had envisioned (Vaughan 1960: Vol. 1, 6). Natural sociability implied self-regulation, stability, and the achievement of the best of possible worlds through the pursuit of self-interest, but Rousseau with his knowledge of the actual effects of social forces was unable to take such abstract confidence in the operation of society. In the State of Nature men had been selfish; they had cared only for themselves, but in a very benign way. This innate selfishness was transformed in society into something very different and by no means natural, namely the self-love of *amour-propre* with all its nefarious consequences (Melzer 1990: 102). As Rousseau writes, he looked at the operation of man in his natural condition and found that it was not

³⁹⁰ Rousseau took the "whole human problem" and reduced it "to the problem of oppression," meaning the negative effects that arise from living with others (Melzer 1990: 84).

"necessary to introduce into it that of sociability" and that society rather than being a natural characteristic of man's existence had actually "succeeded in stifling Nature" (Rousseau 1997: 127). Selfishness, in other words, was natural for Rousseau, but society was not. Moreover, it was through the contradictory combination of the two, especially as made apparent through the liberal atmosphere of the Enlightenment, that all of man's problems could be traced.

His contemporaries were thus reaching for society, but were unable to abandon their traditional conception of the subject. Rousseau was able to take what they were searching for to a whole new level by transforming society into an achieved characteristic and with this he developed a different conception of human agency. And like Augustine and Petrarch, as the centrality of the State of Nature for his theory shows, Rousseau used history as a means of overcoming seemingly intractable dilemmas within both his personal life and the overall cultural circumstances of his time. History acted as a free space whereby he could project his own feelings of frustration and inauthenticity, his own struggles with otherness, back to a time at which he presumed these did not exist. In looking for a solution to otherness, he looked to the past—not necessarily to a time discernible in the historical record but, like the others, to one as remote as possible and shrouded in obscurity—to a time when men were presumed to live in a completely different way than in his day. This provided the locus around which a solution could be built, and the nature of this discovery, attempting to undo the damage caused by man's departure from the State of Nature, would underpin all the elements of his theory that came after it. And for Rousseau history itself, therefore, in the sense of a distinctly human realm of achievement, really only begins when society begins, as Bloom writes, "man is the only animal with a history" (Bloom 1979: 3). The content of history clearly revolves around what civilization and society do to the individual. History is what society says is both important and unimportant, what it tries to hide or what it has caused to take place. And in this his discovery that even man's experience with a natural world formerly taken to be self-evident is conditioned by his social existence, Rousseau, as Horowitz extensively discusses in his work *Rousseau, Nature and History*, is the true founder of critical history because he is the first to realize the central importance of culture in shaping every facet of man's perception of reality that "society and the human being emerge together in a single process" (Horowitz 1987: 75), or as Rousseau

himself writes, that man's nature is dynamic because it is made malleable by culture with the result that "the Mankind of one age is not the Mankind of another age" (Rousseau 1997: 186).³⁹¹

Yet Shklar is correct when she writes that Rousseau was "the last great political theorist to be utterly uninterested in history" (Shklar 1969: 1). He believed perfection to be an omnipresent possibility and did not have a developmental view of salvation as Hegel and Marx would, even though paradoxically his ideas necessarily laid the groundwork for historicism. While it is true that for Rousseau the appearance of society and history, in the sense of autogenous human activity, are indistinguishable, this is so only because such a view of history is made implicit through the importance that he attaches to sociohistorical circumstances in shaping the life of the individual. As we shall see, Rousseau wanted man to break free from history, and his actual use of history is, consequently, not historicist at all; if it were, it would have been mired in what passed for historical research in his own day. He viewed the past not as simply laced with irrationality, as the *philosophes* asserted, but as attached to a system of inequality that could not help but create distortions in the service of domination. History, Rousseau maintained, had actually been corrupted because of the influence of what the *philosophes* prized so highly. What they thought was good, high culture, and reason, was actually bad and had merely served to corrupt and disguise man's true nature.³⁹² And so Rousseau's use of the past had to be conjectural and imaginative to untangle the morass that was the effect of society on history. He needed to rely on his own intuition to conceive a State of Nature that, as he himself admitted, could be nothing but a hypothetical reconstruction. It goes without saying also that, as with the other figures, we can see from Rousseau's hatred of society and sophistication that he envisioned human history as not consisting of progress, but of his contemporaries as living in a time of decline, one which, through human degradation, had revealed the true nature of man. Men in the State of Nature had lived implicitly according to man's true nature. The task for Rousseau would be to demonstrate how this nature, now that it had been overtly revealed through its absence and man's corruption via his historiographical investigation, could be harnessed so as to offer a solution to the social problem.

³⁹¹ And again in *Emile*, "the farther we are removed from the State of Nature, the more we lose our natural tastes; or, rather, habit gives us a second nature that we substitute for the first to such an extent that none of us knows this first nature any more" (Rousseau 1979: 151).

³⁹² As Grimsley writes, "since history was the story of man's fall, and the present state of the world the consequence of his degradation, the meaning of his being could not be clarified by either a metaphysical or an empirical analysis of the historical situation" (Grimsley 1973: 155).

Solving the Problem of Society

In the Second Discourse Rousseau's approach to what could be termed the "social problem," the idea that society was not just imperfect but inherently bad, captured everyone's attention because it was so revolutionary. And to many of his contemporaries it was also a slap in the face.³⁹³ Emboldened by the Second Discourse's reception, Rousseau increasingly assumed the role of a devil's advocate in *philosophe* circles (Rousseau 1954: 388). He was gradually becoming a more active opponent of the Enlightenment, verbalizing ideas and resentments that he had perhaps not thought fit to express before. He was becoming more and more disillusioned with the intellectual culture of Paris: "as I continued to explore it, I could see only foolishness and error in the doctrines of our sages, nothing but oppression and misery in our social order" (Rousseau 1954: 387). He soon resolved to put his philosophy into practice, not just by assuming the garb of a simple man but in endeavouring to live away from civilization itself. With this in mind he resolved to leave Paris, ironically "at the precise moment" that "he 'arrived' as a man of letters" (Hullung 2001: 64).

Initially he planned to relocate to Geneva but an acquaintance from *philosophe* circles, Mme Louise d'Epinay, offered him a cottage on her estate at La Chevrette, just outside Paris. His residence there, to which he moved in 1756, was called the Hermitage (Rousseau 1954: 369).³⁹⁴ But as would be the case for many of the places in which Rousseau would live for the rest of his life, he would leave the Hermitage under the shadow of a massive falling out with his host characterized by mutual loathing.³⁹⁵ This departure would come in December 1757. Rousseau then relocated to the nearby town of Montmorency, where he was offered a drafty, somewhat squalid, house by an admirer. It had a turret in which he wrote like some medieval

³⁹³ As Horowitz writes, "what could be at once more insulting and more paradoxical to the enlightened mind than the demonstration that man in a State of Nature, whose life is admittedly solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short has no reason to envy civilized man" (Horowitz 1987: 130).

³⁹⁴ During his time there he would begin to piece together what would eventually be *Julie*, *The Social Contract*, and *Emile*, his three great works devoted to solving the problem of the social. He would also meet at the Hermitage a Mme d'Houdentot, Mme d'Epinay's cousin and sister-in-law, the only woman that he would claim he ever truly loved yet with whom his relationship would only ever be Platonic.

³⁹⁵ As he described it, his condition was "as deplorable as could be. I saw all my friends desert me, and could not find out how or why" (Rousseau 1954: 450). The immediate catalyst for this was Rousseau's suspicions that Mme d'Epinay was spying on him, opening his correspondence with his love interest either out of jealousy or to discredit him (Rousseau 1954: 418). But the true cause was in all likelihood Rousseau's inability to control a paranoia that seemed to increase in tandem with his fame, and his extraordinary rudeness to a host who probably harboured nothing but the best of feelings for him.

alchemist high above the ground overlooking a valley, all the while miserably ailing from the most severe bout yet of his urinary complaint (Rousseau 1954: 452-454). The only work that he would complete during his time at Montmorency was his *Letter d'Alembert*, a polemical essay written ostensibly in opposition to the *philosophes'* mention of the need for a theatre in Geneva in the Encyclopaedia's article on that city, but more extensively against the Enlightenment's entire social program. The *Letter d'Alembert* would constitute his final, total, break with the *philosophe* movement and its scathing attacks and satirical depictions would earn him their lifelong enmity.³⁹⁶ Rousseau would argue, in this his most direct attack on all the accoutrements of high culture and sophistication, that the theatre, far from being a means of civilizing the public through the intellectual richness of its plays, was really, like civilization itself, the cause of the problems that it purported to solve, and that the role of the actor was, consequently, the duplicity of social man incarnate (Rousseau 2004: 309).³⁹⁷

After being at Montmorency for less than a year, Rousseau was visited by the Duc d'Luxembourg, a local resident and one of the most powerful aristocrats in France. The Duke and his wife had been trying to make the acquaintance of Rousseau for some time and up until this point he had deftly avoided them, and most other visitors, by hiding in a cellar underneath the house whenever anyone arrived. But now, in April 1759, he could no longer evade their interest, and taken by their affection and hospitality, he accepted an offer of residence at their country estate in Clichy (Rousseau 1954: 482-484). Over the next three years he would travel with the Duke and his wife and work in the peace and comfort of the courtly circles whose wealth his writings would purport to criticize so vociferously (Damrosch 2007: 308). These would be his most productive years. The stability and security of his residence with the Duke would allow him to release in remarkably short order his romantic novel *Julie* in 1760, his political tract the *Social Contract* in 1762, and later that same year his pedagogical treatise *Emile*.

Although the form and impetus for these writings varied, they were forged together by Rousseau's own existential anguish into a consistent whole (Starobinski 1988: 274), to become the three main works of his "system" of thought, as he would phrase it in a later work *Rousseau*:

³⁹⁶ In it he would directly ridicule his former mentor Diderot by comparing him to Aristarchus, the ancient originator of the heliocentric theory, famously writing that "I have him no more; I want him no more" (Rousseau 2004: 256). He would also rebuke that powerful paragon of the Enlightenment and resident of Geneva, Voltaire, as well as cast doubt on the very values and ideas that the *philosophes* prized so highly.

³⁹⁷ Rousseau saw the theatre as a microcosm of modern culture (Berman 1970: 127).

Juge de Jean Jacques.³⁹⁸ They demonstrate Rousseau's genius in that, like Voltaire, he was able to write masterpieces in every sort of genre. The aim of all his work after the Second Discourse, to which he intended to devote the remainder of his writings to solving, was finding a way to undo the damage caused by the discovery of society by recreating the kind of moral harmony that he envisioned as existing in the State of Nature and whose absence he had always felt so deeply in his own life.³⁹⁹ Rousseau, as we shall examine more in his work *Emile*, did have an image of "salvation" achievable by man through correcting a flaw that he himself had caused. As he writes in his *Letter to Voltaire*, "If men are the sole authors of their ills... then there is always hope for self-improvement" (cited in Shklar 2001: 154). Whether the cause of man's falseness is attributed to original sin, to a Platonic separation from the eternal, or to the discovery of society, the assumption that man is responsible for otherness remains, as does his ultimate redemption through the cancelling out of this primeval fault. And Rousseau, like the other figures, wanted to determine not simply why man failed to find happiness in earthly life even when he seemed to have an image of the better life before his eyes, but also, as he again wrote to Voltaire, to solve the question of "why does he exist" (Rousseau 1997: 234). This not in the physical sense of man's existence, but one which seeks to discover why he is the way that he is and not some other way, why is he distinct from the rest of nature, what is the reason for this difference, and why did he leave the harmony of the natural realm.

Rousseau had begun what would become the romance novel *Julie* out of loneliness at the house in Montmorency. Confused and alienated by the sudden loss of his friends, he conceived two women companions, Julie d'Etange and her cousin and companion Claire d'Orbe.⁴⁰⁰ He then invented a male tutor and lover to accompany them, known simply as Saint-Preux, a younger and more personable version of himself. The scattered love letters and fictional biographies that he developed gradually became entwined not just with his sense of loneliness but with his sexual

³⁹⁸ I have not included this work in my examination of Rousseau because of its notorious displays of paranoia and the repetitive nature of its dialogues. The whole of the work is an attempt to defend his personal reputation against his detractors so as to justify the public's engagement with his "system," something which takes place in the work's third and last dialogue.

³⁹⁹ Rousseau's solution would be just as well thought out and intricate in its level of sophistication as was Augustine's and, like him, Rousseau's ideas can only be taken as a piece. But he would offer his answer to the problem of man's existence in a different manner, proceeding, perhaps unintentionally, not directly to his solution but by way of half-resolutions meant to bring out his true intention or own definitive solution to the problem of otherness as caused by society.

⁴⁰⁰ "I endowed them with analogous but different characters... I made one dark, the other fair; one lively, the other gentle; one sensible, the other weak" (Rousseau 1954: 400).

frustrations and even with his experience as an outsider in a foreign land (McDowell 1968: 3).⁴⁰¹ As Rousseau's sense of social isolation deepened, his fantasy became more and more elaborate, gradually taking on the proportions of the effusive romance novels of his childhood.⁴⁰² The core message of *Julie* or *La Nouvelle Heloise* is the journey made by the characters from a life of subservience to selfish desire to virtue. *Julie* is a depiction of the ways in which modern dehumanized individuals, hedonistic cripples, casualties of a deformed society, can come to escape their slavery to an emotional selfhood that Rousseau considers inauthentic.

The novel is divided into two parts, with the first half focused on the love affair between Saint-Preux and Julie, and the last on their moral reform. Julie and Saint-Preux are separated through the actions of Julie's father who promises her in marriage to his friend the Baron de Wolmar and whose anger at the liberties taken with her causes Saint-Preux to be dismissed from his position and to wander aimlessly like a broken man on a voyage around the world. Julie, on the advice of Claire, decides to submit to her father's will by embracing her marriage to Wolmar and has children with him, living like a new woman in total marital fidelity on their idyllic estate called Clarens. Wolmar had learned in the military, in contrast to the political philosophers of his day, that "self-interest is not... the only motive for human actions" and consequently attempts to build a new society at Clarens based around self-sacrifice (Rousseau 1968: 318). In contrast to the aristocracy of his time, drawing wealth from their estates to live lavishly in the cities, Wolmar reinvests all the profits of Clarens back into the community to improve the well-being of its inhabitants (Rousseau 1968: 308). The estate functions like a perfect society, with Wolmar, a sort of benign dictator, essentially acting as a stand in for God on Earth and Julie as his helpmate.⁴⁰³ Wolmar likes to influence men but is not influenced by them, in the sense of being concerned about their impression of him (Rousseau 1968: 261). His ideal is to become a "living eye," one who functions in society to contemplate it rather than to feel its pressures (Rousseau 1968: 317).

⁴⁰¹ Midway through the novel Saint-Preux, goes to Paris and is overwhelmed by the falseness of its inhabitants (Rousseau 1968: 202).

⁴⁰² He became more immersed in this world, seeing "nothing anywhere but the two charming girl friends, their man, their surroundings, and the country they lived in, nothing but objects created or embellished for them by my imagination. I was no longer master of myself even for a moment, the delirium never left me" (Rousseau 1954: 404).

⁴⁰³ Wolmar possesses a "tranquil mind" and a "cold heart" and is not driven by pity for others so much as by a "natural love of order" that mirrors, as we shall soon see, the ordering principle that Rousseau believes God plays in reality.

Through her deep respect for Wolmar, Julie is driven to abandon her desire for Saint-Preux. She comes to choose virtue and honour over love in her belief that the bond provided by these is "no less sweet and is only more lasting" (Rousseau 1968: 261). Wolmar and Julie have children and she becomes the matriarch of the community. She selflessly lives to better the well-being of those around her in conformity to what she comes to see as the higher calling of a human life. She begins to believe that even if her choice of marriage had been a free one, she would still have chosen Wolmar over Saint-Preux (Rousseau 1968: 262). Wolmar then benevolently invites Saint-Preux to also come and live in Clarens, intending to "cure" him of his slavish desire for Julie (Rousseau 1968: 284). He accepts and also soon comes to admire Wolmar to such a great extent that his desire for Julie gives way to a faithful obedience to his dictates. Saint-Preux, a man whose listless life left him "dead to virtue as well as to happiness," thereafter gives himself up to Wolmar as if "to God Himself" (Rousseau 1968: 360).⁴⁰⁴

At the end of the novel Julie dies saving her son from drowning (Rousseau 1968: 395). And on her deathbed she talks only of others and of her projects for improving the community. Julie's death is a tragic one and is viewed as such by all the people around her.⁴⁰⁵ After her death Saint-Preux stays on at Clarens as tutor to Julie's children. Julie's death, moreover, comes to serve as an example to the entire community of how to live. She becomes a saint around which to rally with the result that "all those she loved gather together to give her a new existence" (Rousseau 1968: 406). The journey of the characters to a higher life, then, is seemingly complete; they have come to the point of desiring to live in Clarens, as Saint-Preux evidently permanently does in the end, because they have lived in the real world and felt its many disappointments. Their desires have been thwarted by what they themselves believe to be more nobler ends, and so they have chosen—not through reason but from feelings of desperation and hopelessness from being in disharmony with their own true nature and with the expectations of others—to subordinate themselves to Wolmar and his order. The lack of virtue displayed by the characters at the beginning of the novel, owing to their insatiable desire, is supplanted by an intense passion to practice virtue itself through abiding by a kind of social harmony (McDowell 1968: 13).

⁴⁰⁴ And in a parallel to Rousseau's own acceptance of Mme Houdentot's choice not to sleep with him, so Saint-Preux grows to accept Julie's loyalty to Wolmar (McDowell 1968: 6).

⁴⁰⁵ Even the unshakeable Wolmar weeps at the death of his wife (Rousseau 1968: 396-397).

This is a pursuit of virtue that is not rational or even connected to any particular type of action or conduct; it is instead driven by feeling and becomes a "sentiment... and, moreover, the strongest of them all" (McDowell 1968: 13). But this resolution is ultimately unsuccessful. As Julie lies dying she realizes that she never stopped loving Saint-Preux, only Wolmar's Godlike will deluded her into believing this, albeit with positive implications for those around her. In the end, even with her children and husband left behind, Julie welcomes her own death, the destruction of an inauthentic selfhood built on self-deception. She takes solace in death because the demands of a virtuous life are incompatible with what she believes she desires, Saint-Preux's love.⁴⁰⁶ And indeed the message at the end of the novel is that she must die because driven by self-contradiction, what she seeks to be or how she seeks to live is incompatible with how she lives. Julie, even as motivated by her realization that living a life of virtue is in line with her true nature as a human being, remains at odds with herself, and the problem of the social self is thus not solved.

The remedy that Clarens sought to provide to the problem of society, the lack of authentic selfhood and the self-destructive separation from others through simple self-sacrifice, is therefore exposed as an unsatisfactory one.^{407 408} Julie did live a virtuous life, but her actual self, what she took herself to be, remained constrained by, and only served to perpetuate, the inauthenticity that characterizes social man's existence.⁴⁰⁹ Her condition is so contradictory that the ultimate expression of her virtue— attempting to save her son at the risk of her own life— also kills her. She dies because her character cannot survive her reformation. Rousseau's ideal of restoring man's inner harmony from the State of Nature, of a man whose actions and desires are in line with one another, is not found in the life of Julie or in the self-contained paradisiacal world that is Clarens. The place instead serves as a mere refuge for the emotionally damned, as

⁴⁰⁶ And so in depriving her of life, fortune "no longer deprives me of anything regrettable and instead protects my honor" (Rousseau 1968: 405).

⁴⁰⁷ As Damrosch writes, Clarens only served to minimize the damage of society on the self, but "the damage can never be eliminated altogether" (Damrosch 2007: 322).

⁴⁰⁸ Indeed Rousseau himself writes in his *Confessions* that "harmony and the public peace" was the underlying theme of the book in addition to the obvious commentary on sentimentality and the importance of fidelity in marriage (Rousseau 1954: 405).

⁴⁰⁹ Julie unsuccessfully tried "to obliterate a whole dimension of herself: memories of the past, responses to the present, hopes for the future... Her 'new self' is really a new form of self-mutilation" (Berman 1970: 244). Julie tried and failed in her attempt to create a world, i.e. a version of her self, that was completely under her own control. On her deathbed "she lifts the veil which she has lowered over herself, and confronts the feelings she has suppressed for so long" (Berman 1970: 263).

a sort of preserve for the casualties of social man's own inner disharmony.⁴¹⁰ Julie's death at the end of the novel raises the question of whether the natural existence of human beings and the false world of culture engendered by society is reconcilable and indicates that any resolution to this must be found beyond simple self-sacrifice.⁴¹¹ In his attempt to remedy social man's deformity, Rousseau next would move beyond the level of the individual by turning to the organization of society in an attempt to find a way in which it could be made to produce individuals not subject to the destructive *amour-propre* of civilization, and so generally capable of identifying their own well-being with the well-being of others, thereby solving the social problem.

The Social Contract

In the preface to the *Social Contract*, Rousseau indicates that its content was largely taken from a much more extensive work that "no longer exists" (Rousseau 1978: 46). This was the epic survey of Government that he first conceived during his time in Venice. It was there that, inspired by what he took to be the degeneracy of that ancient republic and its people, he had first understood, Rousseau later claimed, "that everything is rooted in politics" (Rousseau 1954: 377).⁴¹² Nevertheless, despite the fact that it was apparently an abridgment from a much more ambitious work, the *Social Contract* is Rousseau's political treatise *par excellence*. As with practically all of his literary endeavours, it is a *magnum opus* whose content was revolutionary in that it discussed concepts associated with political life in completely new ways, such as sovereignty and legitimate authority, that were formerly taken for granted. As he concentrated primarily on an individual coming to choose virtue out of an appeal to emotion or feeling in *Julie*, so in the *Social Contract*, since he is dealing with relations between people who are by implication less intimately acquainted, authenticity is pursued by means of an appeal to reason

⁴¹⁰ And Clarens, therefore, as a highly artificial environment, "a sort of moral biosphere," as Damrosch puts it, is not a model of what is possible or desirable for human beings in their fallen social state (Damrosch 2007: 320).

⁴¹¹ In Starobinski's words Julie and Saint Preux's self-denial comes at the price of doing "violence to themselves to escape such memory, and they must repeat the effort again and again. Such perpetual struggle can easily become unbearable. True transcendence requires constant vigilance and deliberate effort. (The past is still seductive and must be repressed constantly)" (Starobinski 1988: 91).

⁴¹² The work was evidently to be titled *Political Institutions* but was abandoned because of its unwieldiness. The ideas expressed in the *Social Contract* were also presaged in his Encyclopaedia article on Political Economy, no doubt also drawn from material compiled for the same work.

through a rational argument based on self-interest about the kind of social formation that would constitute the best kind of society.

Rousseau's conception of the state in the *Social Contract* as it pertains to the individual can most obviously be contrasted to the writings of his predecessor Hobbes. Hobbes argued that an anarchical state of war exists between all men in their natural state, driven as they are by an unending need for security and status, which can only be alleviated through the overpowering force of a sovereign. Rousseau, however, drawing on his notion of the State of Nature, comes to the opposite conclusion, arguing that the state of war between men is a myth.⁴¹³ As the war between men owes to a war over things, objects and ideas, a state in which man's conception of the world does not extend past his body can leave nothing over which to fight. Man in the State of Nature, inward looking and ruled by immediate and transitory needs, would not try to exert his power over other people because he would not "understand what subjection and domination are" (Rousseau 1997: 158). Thus man in his original state would not fear for his own life and so subordinate himself to an overarching power, as Hobbes maintained, for the simple fact that he would not even know that he is alive (Bloom 1979: 9).⁴¹⁴ Equally for the idea of men choosing to freely subordinate themselves to an all-powerful Sovereign, Rousseau ingeniously concludes that such a notion is self-contradictory. This is for the simple reason that "to obligate oneself to obey a master is to return to one's full freedom," and consequently individuals would be fully in their rights if they were to subsequently reverse their decision and choose not to obey (Rousseau 1978: 104).

Subordination to a more powerful individual, then, is certainly not the basis for a government of any legitimacy. And likewise the right of the strongest to rule, by virtue of the energy needed to continually coerce subordination, Rousseau argues, would exceed any benefit that could be derived from its exercise. So, if authority is to exist with any degree of permanency, it must be supplanted by a feeling of duty and obedience, in other words, by a moral obligation (Rousseau 1978: 48). It follows that inquiring after the legitimate basis of authority is the aim of the Social Contract. Rousseau seeks to find a form of social organization to which the individual would subscribe voluntarily since, as just discussed, coercion is evidently

⁴¹³ This is because human beings "in their original independence... do not have sufficiently stable relationships among themselves to constitute either the state of peace or the state of war" (Rousseau 1978: 50).

⁴¹⁴ And for this reason Rousseau is highly critical of Hobbes' egoism, in which the self seeks to assert itself against others in the war of all against all to guarantee its own preservation.

not a viable basis of legitimizing authority given that the war of all against all has no reality (Simpson 2006: 29). As he writes, this is the "fundamental problem" that the Social Contract seeks to solve, because legitimacy can only be obtained through finding a form of association "by means of which each one, uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before" (Rousseau 1978: 53).⁴¹⁵ Rousseau seeks to replace the false freedom of society, of being able to do only as one believes one wants, with a type of freedom in which men truly rule themselves.

The key thing to understand about the Social Contract is that Rousseau's citizen will be made to realize through a rational appeal to self-interest that, owing to the war of all against all in society and the inauthenticity that characterizes the life of modern man, he has nothing to lose and everything to gain from orienting himself to the well-being of the entire community. As Rousseau writes, in so doing the individual will only have "exchanged to their advantage an uncertain, precarious mode of existence for another that is better and safer; natural independence for freedom; the power to harm others for their personal safety; and their force, which others could overcome, for a right which the social union makes invincible" (Rousseau 1978: 64). Just as man in the State of Nature cared only for his self-preservation and identified it with his own well-being, so social man living under what Rousseau would term the Social Contract will realize the importance of society. But, as should be clear, this depends on a fundamental change in the conception of what the self actually is. As social man lives in a state of dependence upon others both in that his physical existence in society depends on others and even to the extent that his mental life is largely a product of culture, so he will come to realize, through the Social Contract, the centrality of interdependence for his life and so change his behaviour accordingly. He will identify the well-being of society as a whole with his own self-preservation, transposing the self-interest of the one to the whole. And of course, whether the Social Contract can work at all, whether man's nature is capable of transformation in this manner, depends, because he is a social product, on a completely malleable view of what man is. Willingly subordinating oneself

⁴¹⁵ This is what Rousseau means by his oft repeated claim that "I have never believed that man's freedom consisted in doing what he wants, but in rather never doing what he does not want to do" (Rousseau 1979(2): 83 *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 6th Promenade).

to the interests of all, then, when submitted to by all is the only form of authenticity available to a social man whose selfhood is actually constituted by society (Crocker 1963: 470).⁴¹⁶

If voluntary submission to the community is to occur, though, the question remains of how the individual can come to know what the whole expects of him. To explain this Rousseau conceives of the notion of the General Will, possibly his most original concept. Some have maintained that the General Will is simply an abstraction, that it has no actual existence but is meant as a heuristic simply because Rousseau had no notion of a collective consciousness or group mind (Rousseau 1978: intro Masters 19; Shklar 1969: 167). But Rousseau himself writes that the General Will is much more than an idea and that as such it embodies the autonomy that he also bestowed on social forces. The General Will exists for Rousseau because it functions as a "thing" in precisely the same way that society is a thing in the sense that it possesses a quasi-agency. The reason for this is simply because Rousseau maintains, as we shall expand on shortly, that the distinct human ability to will is an inherent and inalienable capacity of man's being. And for this reason, the public could no more delegate their wills to a sovereign than someone could remove his arm and put it at the disposal of another, because the will is an intrinsic part of his very self. Therefore, while something like power can be delegated or yielded because it is a physical action rather than a capacity, the ability to will cannot. As he writes, "power can perfectly well be transferred, but not will" (Rousseau 1978: 59). The General Will as a collection of the individual wills of everyone in society, therefore, does have a real existence (Melzer 1990: 160). It has no existence beyond the will of its members but paradoxically, because it remains within the individual yet can go beyond him by virtue of man's social nature, is capable of having a corporate life. This existence is embodied, moreover, in the very thing, i.e. the will, which, as we saw in our examination of the Second Discourse, Rousseau sees as the most distinctive characteristic of human beings.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Thus, as Grimsley writes, the citizen will "willingly give up the independent use of his own limited powers in order to enjoy the security and protection afforded by the total strength of the community acting as a single body" (Grimsley 1973: 98).

⁴¹⁷ Interestingly, as Horowitz points out, the non-transferable nature of will means that there is no such thing as the abstraction of "legitimate government" in the commonly accepted meaning of the word for Rousseau; rather, the exercise of will is based on the actions of the body politic as a whole. Consequently, since individuals cannot transmit their wills to one another through some hierarchical structure but only on the basis of equality among themselves, the pre-eminent question for human beings becomes "the formation of society" or how self-ruling individuals are to get along with one another (Horowitz 175).

But while Vaughan, Shklar, Berman, Arendt, and others have argued that submission to the general will makes Rousseau a proto-totalitarian, such a view could not be further from the truth.⁴¹⁸ Shklar in particular depicts Rousseau in almost Hitlerian, highly coercive, terms, as a man driven by resentment to try and destroy the whole of contemporary society in the service of an "individualism of the weak" (Shklar 1969: 41).⁴¹⁹ Rousseau's theory, instead, relies on creating a new type of person, a new social world in which coercion or force would ultimately not be necessary because all would be united by a shared and voluntary political commitment to one another. It is not, in contrast to what Melzer argues, that the citizen is "constrained to will" what all others would will (Melzer 1990: 154) or that Rousseau would make man into a bee or an ant (Melzer 1990: 95). Rousseau's citizen would simply "have no inclination to disagree with the decisions of the general will" (Cassirer 1963: 28). He would not belong to any special interest group because there would be no such thing as special interest.⁴²⁰

The individual must subordinate himself to the general will of society in the same way that a man driving from one place to another in his car cares not for the route that he takes, merely to the extent that it speeds up or slows down his arrival, but only for his destination. The citizen in Rousseau's ideal state will approach life in this way; he will invest no value in what he formerly cared about, what he equated with his own self-worth, using them now as nothing but tools to arrive at the destination that alone is of any worth. He will realize that status, property, etc. have no importance in themselves because they do not actually represent his individuality and will be ready to discard or change them should the citizen body decide that it is appropriate for him to do so, owing to his recognition that it is the community as a whole that embodies his true individuality. As he writes of his ideal citizen in an essential passage, "when the opinion contrary to mine prevails, that proves nothing except that I was mistaken, and that what I thought

⁴¹⁸ Marshall Berman's take on this is among the most interesting. In his words Rousseau's "desperate need to blot out the self drove him to become the most original and brilliant theorist of totalitarianism" (Berman 1970: 319). For Berman, as I shall discuss more thoroughly throughout this chapter, Rousseau's realization that authenticity in modern society was impossible drove him to try and develop a coercive means of control over the self whereby authenticity would no longer even be sought by the individual.

⁴¹⁹ As she writes, "the people, as Rousseau never forgets, are not very intelligent. It may know its own interests, but it needs help if it is to defend them effectively" (Shklar 1969: 170).

⁴²⁰ Nothing would have repulsed Rousseau more, with his malleable view of human nature, than the blind obedience to a human construct that characterizes totalitarian states, the willingness to sacrifice all to an abstraction.

to be the General Will was not. If my private will had prevailed, I would have done something other than what I wanted. It is then that I would not have been free" (Rousseau 1978: 111).⁴²¹

Determining the General Will is not a manner of simply voting. Moreover, voting should be avoided along with, and in contrast to the Enlightenment's ideal of reason and truth, "long debates, discussions, and tumult" since these indicate "the ascendancy of particular interests and the decline of the state" (Rousseau 1978: 109). And it is for this reason that Rousseau maintained that the individual can best orient himself to the general will in a small state united by shared habits and customs, akin to Aristotle's ideal polis in his *Politics*.⁴²² And when this occurs, when the people acts as a body, Rousseau startlingly claims that it can never make the wrong choice because it can never want what is bad for itself unless it is fooled by disingenuous self-interested parties (Rousseau 1978: 61). This is simply because, as mentioned repeatedly, what is in the best interests of all will necessarily, in Rousseau's conception, be in the best interests of the social individual. This also applies to international relations, for a state that abides by the General Will would never enter into an unjust war of aggression because such a war, Rousseau claims, is always motivated by the self-interest of the few or by considerations of material gain that would upset the harmony of the citizen body (Rousseau 1978: 213).⁴²³

The people as a whole acting selflessly for the common good, likewise, cannot act against its own interest.⁴²⁴ An individual living according to the social contract cannot have an interest that is contrary to the state since he orients himself to the will of all, making it impossible for the sovereign, the body politic, to harm itself by acting against the interest of one of its members (Rousseau 1978: 55). Just as the individual in the State of Nature is led by *amour de soi*, the desire for self-preservation, so the state, when it functions as a unified whole in the manner described above, becomes a supra-individual that cannot harm itself and cares only for

⁴²¹ Rousseau relies on the figure of the Lawgiver to explain how a system of government guided by general will can be provided to the people in a given community without being tainted by their individual interest. The Lawgiver is clearly modeled on the sages of antiquity. Like them, he is supremely enlightened, selfless, uninterested in power, and generally an outsider.

⁴²² The state should be small enough so that the individual can directly perceive the wishes of the community without the mediation of any potentially self-interested party. It is only as such a social formation that the will of the public can be generalized through the mutual recognition of a common interest and the general attitude of a complete malleability of opinion since "everyone necessarily subjects himself to the condition he imposes on others" (Rousseau 1978: 63).

⁴²³ And in the same vein, for all these reasons, and as we saw in the First Discourse, economic equality between the citizens of such a state would be an imperative to prevent the manipulation of some by others, lest stock be put in the objects of inequality or in the comparisons used to measure the worth of individuals in civilization (Grimsley 1973: 98).

⁴²⁴ "It cannot even will to do so" (Rousseau 1978: 62).

its own well being (Grimsley 1973: 99). The *amour de soi* of the State of Nature, deformed in society as *amour-propre*, is healed then by its transference to the public as a whole. The love of the self becomes the love of the collective.

And Rousseau's ideal state, one capable of forming ideal citizens, will use every tool at its disposal to penetrate to the "inner man" to instil within him a love of his country (Rousseau 1978: 216).⁴²⁵ This all encompassing conditioning process would be aimed entirely at fostering within the citizen a sense of the General Will, transforming "the war of all against all into an artificial *esprit social*" (Garrard 2003: 8).⁴²⁶ It is not as Melzer maintains, then, that Rousseau

⁴²⁵ As Rousseau writes, the individual must be "trained early enough never to consider their persons except as related to the body of the State, and not to perceive their own existence, so to speak, except as part of the State's... to love it with that delicate sentiment that any isolated man feels only for himself... and thereby to transform into a sublime virtue this dangerous disposition from which all our vices arise" (Rousseau 1978: 222).

⁴²⁶ Rousseau wanted, above all, to imbue the Social Contract with a sense of majesty and unassailability through ritualistic and communal religious displays of loyalty to the state largely modeled on the civic cults of antiquity. This civil religion would lack a formal theology, instead restricting itself to a few ironclad tenets which Rousseau saw as universal across all belief systems. These would include the "sanctity of the social contract" itself, an afterlife in which virtue was rewarded, as well as a belief in a "powerful, intelligent, beneficent" divinity responsible for the harmonious ordering of both social and natural life and on which the citizen was to model their own actions (Rousseau 1978: 131). Like his Roman forbearers, Rousseau's civil religion would focus on the here and now and would limit its purview as much as possible to the material world. For metaphysical questions, such as those on which the Catholic Church based itself, it would pay no heed. And because it purported to offer no answers to them would proscribe only one spiritual position, tolerance of any conceivable opinion, because "the sovereign has no competence in the other world, whatever the fate of subjects in the life hereafter, it is none of its business, as long as they are good citizens in this one" (Rousseau 1978: 130). But the emphasis that he placed on tolerance, along with many other Enlightenment thinkers, did not extend to dissension from the Civil Religion itself and again, as for the Romans, a failure to participate would be seen as tantamount to an attack on the whole community. And for such an aberration, like them, Rousseau would lay out the most severe of punishments namely death, something so "shocking to progressive liberal opinion" in Rousseau's time because it harkened back to the extremism of the religious wars (Grimsley 1983: 117), and which in modern times some commentators, such as Crocker, have criticized for its inconsistency (Crocker 1973: 183-184; 189).

However, to depict the civil religion in this way is to approach it from a Christian perspective and to misunderstand what Rousseau had in mind. The attempt to blend the political and the theological into what he terms an "exclusive national religion" (Rousseau 1978: 131), was precisely designed to avoid the Roman Catholicism which by now Rousseau had come to detest. Recognising the importance of spirituality for a being who, in his view, possesses a soul and a free will capable of extending itself to the whole of reality, Rousseau understood that religious extremism was always a risk for human beings and could only be avoided, as was the case in the ancient world, through separating the material and spiritual sides of religion. In anchoring religion to the state while separating its esoteric side, Rousseau would ensure that the "mixed and unsocial right" of Catholicism that "is so manifestly bad that it is a waste of time to amuse oneself by proving it" would never again emerge to endanger humanity (Rousseau 1978: 128). The aim of his Civil Religion, in other words, was not simply to provide a medium for the citizens to display loyalty to the state, but also to ensure that the Social Contract would never be threatened by metaphysical belief systems which attempted to dangerously draw the individual away from the community, "from it as from all worldly things... I know of nothing more contrary to the social spirit" (Rousseau 1978: 128). As he believed was the case for Christianity, this kind of spirituality left itself liable to be usurped by social forces seeking inequality. Foreshadowing Nietzsche, Rousseau even claimed that "true Christians are made to be slaves" since "this brief life is of too little worth in their view" (Rousseau 1978: 130). Rousseau's Civil Religion, then, was trying to supplant an authentic social brotherhood for an illusory one, to relegate metaphysics to a separate benign

decides that since man cannot go back to the State of Nature, i.e. cannot renounce culture, that he must embrace either "total selfishness or total sociability;" rather, both of these possibilities become extant through the Social Contract (Melzer 1990: 90). But it is ironic in this respect that for all his criticism of coercion as the basis of legitimacy, Rousseau more or less comes to rely on a quasi-coercive power to mold men into what he wants them to be, albeit one that he believes would ultimately be voluntarily accepted once the degradations of society were dispelled.⁴²⁷ Again, though, this would still not be a totalitarian coercion, but one that invests absolute power within the people as a whole, within a kind of direct democracy guided by an absolutist General Will.

And just as Julie was the embodiment of an individual governed by virtue, Rousseau seems to have felt the need to include in the *Social Contract* an example of what a body politic governed by the *Social Contract* would look like. While Rousseau does extensively praise the Spartans in the *Social Contract*, drawing out comparisons between what he proposes and how they were purported to live as described mainly in Thucydides, the near mythical nature of their society made them a poor source for his exposition. As a result he devotes almost the entirety of the second half of the *Social Contract* to an examination of the political institutions of Ancient Rome. This has puzzled some commentators on the work, yet the reason that he does this is clearly because the best constituted society in history, the one that in Rousseau's conception most closely resembles the ideal of the *Social Contract*, was Republican Rome itself. Rousseau, as a man long "consumed with admiration for everything ancient," believed that it was Rome that had come closest to achieving a harmonious blend between the individual and society (Melzer 1990: 25).⁴²⁸

As we have seen Rousseau was raised on Plutarch's heroic stories of self-sacrifice for the greater good. Republican Rome, for Rousseau, was the pinnacle of civilization, not as was the case for Petrarch because it was an age of individualism, but, for the opposite reason, because it

realm, and as such his aim was really to foreclose any kind of extremism that could endanger the Social Contract, by depriving it of any opportunity for its emergence.

⁴²⁷ Private individuals in this respect "must be obligated to make their wills conform to their reason" while the general public "must be taught to know what it wants" (Rousseau 1978: 67).

⁴²⁸ As he writes in his article on Political Economy, the Romans "stood out over all the peoples of the earth for the deference of the government toward private individuals and for its scrupulous attention to the inviolable rights of all members of the State. Nothing was as sacred as the life of the simple citizen... In Rome and in the armies, everything betokened that love of the citizens for one another and that respect for the name Roman which aroused courage and animated the virtue of anyone who had the honor to bear it" (Rousseau 1978: 221).

represented both the way that social man should live with his fellows and the achievements that could result from the well-constituted society.⁴²⁹ Rousseau saw the Roman political system as a means by which public opinion could be expressed in a way that transcended partisan interests through direct democracy.⁴³⁰ And as a self-sufficient agricultural state that disdained luxury and extended itself through primarily defensive wars waged by what Rousseau would have termed citizen militias, Rome's success became in his own mind proof of the superiority of a state governed by the Social Contract. Rome for Rousseau was thus the epitome of the "republic of virtue," as opposed perhaps to Petrarch's republic of letters (Garrard 2003: 68). It was a place in which the selfish *amour-propre* of civilized man could be redirected for the betterment of the whole community. In Rousseau's mind it was a city inhabited by selfless men willing to live entirely, even to the point of self-sacrifice, for their country. Men whose virtue, as he writes in his *Encyclopaedia* article on Political Economy, "engendered by a horror of tyranny and the crimes of tyrants and by innate patriotism, turned all their homes into as many school for citizens" (Rousseau 1978: 224). Rome was a society in which the General Will was implicitly heeded, because of the morality and lack of division between private and public interest, brought about by the unique circumstances that prevailed in that state. "A citizen of Rome was neither Caius nor Lucius; he was a Roman" (Rousseau 1979: 40).⁴³¹

Yet Rome fell, not so much because of internal as because of external factors, as its very successes increasingly tied it to foreign wars and created a decadence that destroyed the social fabric. Like Julie, Rome's inherent virtue was at odds with the desires engendered by an

⁴²⁹ And for this reason, in Melzer's words, it was Rousseau's "most important example" of a political regime worthy of emulation (Melzer 1990: 222).

⁴³⁰ Overall it could be said that Rousseau saw in the Roman constitution an elaborate system of checks and balances to ensure the participation of the citizen body in politics, one in which public opinion is, as he puts it, "not subject to constraint" (Rousseau 1978: 124), so as to prevent the rise of self-interested Kings or dictators (Melzer 1990: 229). Even as the Republic went into decline, buffered as it was by pressures from rising inequality and a growing empire, the system was so well constituted that, as Rousseau writes, it is "unbelievable" that "by virtue of its ancient regulations this immense people did not cease to elect its magistrates, pass laws, try cases, and expedite public or private affairs" (Rousseau 1978: 120). He admired this system because it was sanctioned, moreover, not so much by a written law subject to manipulation as through conventions ingrained within the value system of the entire population.

⁴³¹ And this idealization could not even be tempered by the undeniable fact that the political liberty, the "virtue" possessed by the citizens of ancient Rome meaning, of course, the adult male population, was built on slavery. Rousseau anticipates this criticism and replies that people in the modern world, because of the inauthenticity of their selfhood, although they "have no slaves... are slaves," and that as a result they are "more cowardly than humane" (Rousseau 1978: 103). He seems to claim then, at least in the ancient context, that it is preferable for some to enjoy true freedom even if it at the expense of the great majority (Shklar 1969: 205).

imperfect world, the fallen world of civilization that Rousseau so detested.⁴³² If Rome could not last, Rousseau writes in the *Social Contract*, "what state can hope to endure forever" (Rousseau 1978: 89). Rome's fall evidently shows that a form of social organization that seeks to bring out the best in men, like Julie's desire for a life of honour, is an imperfect solution to the problem of the human condition laid out in the Second Discourse. Rousseau's difficulty with Rome, then, is not that it lacked "particularity" among its citizen body because the Romans did not differentiate between themselves and society and thus remained "less than complete as a model for a fully human civilization" (Horowitz 1987: 105-107).⁴³³ This would not have concerned Rousseau in the context of the *Social Contract* for the reasons examined above. Rather Rousseau is attempting to demonstrate, in my view, that a societal level answer to the problem of social man—that is to say one that would try to construct an ideal society—would itself, at best, be a provisional solution to the problem of otherness. The virtue gained by Julie through her life in Clarens as guided by right feeling or self-sacrifice or by Rome through its form of social organization are alike ultimately ineffective means of responding to the problem of the social, because they still exist in a world in which they are the exception and so are at the mercy of that world.⁴³⁴ The answers to the social problem presented in *Julie* and the *Social Contract* do not actually make them invulnerable to the perils of the social. They are contrived solutions to a problem. Actually dispelling the negative effects of civilization demands leaving the evils of the past behind rather than merely setting them aside in a quasi-utopia. As Julie, the most virtuous of women, died, so Rome, the best constituted society, inevitably fell, and I think that this is the message that Rousseau seeks to convey through the prominence that he gives Rome in the second half of the *Social Contract*.

To heal man, Rousseau must move on to the shaping from birth of a new sort of human being, one who, if all were to follow his example, would not be plagued by the contradictions encountered by Rome and by Julie. The *Social Contract* relying as it ultimately does on self-interest, did not escape the objectification of self and other through *amour-propre* in society, but

⁴³² As he writes in his article on Political Economy, "Rome was for five hundred years a continual miracle that the world cannot hope to see again" (Rousseau 1978: 224).

⁴³³ "Many ancient societies, Rousseau imagined, had been governed in such a totalistic and repressive way that their members had never developed any sense of self" (Berman 1970: 271).

⁴³⁴ The social possesses a sort of agency above human determination. Thus it was inevitably dynamic with the result that "Neither individuals nor social systems could be frozen forever in a state of perfect innocence. Thus any classically totalitarian state was doomed to be swept away by the dynamism of social development, which flowed irresistibly on through the modern age, inseparable from human life itself" (Berman 1970: 277).

merely transformed it. Rousseau's task, then, is to bring man to salvation by reconciling the division between his self and his creations as caused by his "fall" on leaving the State of Nature. Rousseau will create in *Emile* an individual who is at one with his nature, as was the case in the State of Nature, yet who at the same time will not forfeit his humanity, the ability to actively live a moral life and to enjoy the achievements of his reason (Horowitz 1987: 17). *Emile* will not rely on self-interest but will live a new sort of existence, one in which he simply identifies himself with the external world and so is invulnerable to social perils, thereby providing a definitive and profound solution to the problem of the social.

The Solution to the Social Problem in Emile

Emile outlines the process through which a child is raised from birth to live a natural and harmonious life, not because he is coerced into doing so or because he thinks this is what he must do owing to his awareness of others expectations, but simply because his education allows him to correctly identify this with his actual being, with what he is. And in its attempts to correctly educate the child *Emile* is a microcosm of undoing the damage done by society to man on his departure from the State of Nature.⁴³⁵ *Emile* is not a "second best" alternative to the lost harmony of the State of Nature for an unsatisfactory world as some have suggested (Parry 2001: 264).⁴³⁶ Instead, it is the resolution of Rousseau's entire project and, as proof of this, he writes

⁴³⁵ The original impetus for *Emile* came from a friend's desire to find a better way to educate her son. But after this initial prompting, as was the case with *Julie*, Rousseau's isolation caused him to withdraw ever deeper into himself and to increasingly connect his personal problems to its writing. *Emile* shows that Rousseau envisioned salvation to be within the grasp of men and he came to see the work perhaps as the embodiment of "his own better self" (Grimsley 1983: 142). Rousseau's claim to have fathered, and subsequently given away, five children with *Thérèse*, if in fact true, would no doubt also have provided a strong impetus for *Emile*'s writing.

⁴³⁶ Intriguingly, Berman sees Rousseau's entire project as a sort of admission of failure, that is to say of a failure to find an authentic subjectivity. Berman argues that Rousseau realized that man's alienation was inescapable and so set out to make an inauthentic mode of life palatable, in the sense that man would not realize, as was the case with man's worldview in the State of Nature, that there was any alternative to it. In Berman's words that human nature would have to "learn to live in such a world, for this is now the only world there is" (Berman 1970: 166). "Rousseau looked long and hard at the world he lived in, and saw no hope for authenticity there. But if this was so, would it not be most genuinely liberal to protect modern men from the fatal lure of this dream, and from the inevitable bleakness of the morning after?... He thought carefully about how men could be educated so that the hope of authenticity would disappear from their minds, or else be kept from appearing" (Berman 1970: 299). As is clear from what will appear below, I see the *Profession of the Faith of the Savoyard Vicar* as an attempt to morally perfect man by putting him in harmony with nature to as great extent as is possible. Rousseau's discussion of conscience as a perfected form of the faculty of natural pity makes this plain.

that he believed at the time of its composition that it was to be his "last and best work" (Rousseau 1954: 523).

Rousseau begins Emile's education by emphasizing that contemporary theories of how children learn, which view them as small adults through making rational appeals to them, are completely misguided because they try to make the child into a man "before being a man," and so disregard what a child is (Rousseau 1979: 34).⁴³⁷ While Locke, in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, argued that children had to be reasoned with as if they were adults, Rousseau claims that "if children understood reason, they would not need to be raised" (Rousseau 1979: 89). Rousseau maintains, in contrast, that children until the age of twelve live in the immediacy that he identifies with the life of natural man in the State of Nature.⁴³⁸ Such a view implicitly entails a conception of the world as simply an extension of one's own self with the result that the child cannot help but attempt in every situation to dominate all things and all people.⁴³⁹ The child, in other words, lacks an ego, and does not even view their own being as an object imbued with a self-image informed by values and beliefs. But for this reason also and essentially, as with Rousseau's view of social man and his potential to undo the damage caused by society, children, because they lack a defined self, are dependent on the adults who raise them and as such can be guided or shaped in beneficial ways so long as their capacities at different stages of their development are respected and manipulated appropriately.

If the human being is ever to be "perfected," Rousseau argues, education must mirror the development of man's consciousness and be geared at its earliest stages, when he most closely resembles natural man, to enable him to learn from that over which man has no control, from nature itself and then from things (Rousseau 1979: 40). The education of children, not to fall into error, must therefore overwhelmingly be one that allows nature to express itself, what

⁴³⁷ In a rare display of eurocentricism, inspired by Montesquieu's theory of the mind in the *Spirit of the Laws*, Rousseau begins Emile by making the eponymous protagonist of the work a Frenchman, believing that if he is to be an ideal example of what is possible for human beings, the boy must be an inhabitant of the Earth's temperate zone since "the organization of the brain is less perfect" in areas of climactic extreme (Rousseau 1979: 52).

⁴³⁸ As he writes, the "child receives not ideas but images," which is to say that the child can only passively see and react to the world, imagining it but not comparing its objects in the way that judgement necessitates (Rousseau 1979: 107). For the same reason educating a child through fear, by trying to coerce them into abiding by the wishes of adults, Rousseau asserts, would be pointless. To do so would be to engage in a battle of wills with the child that one could not win, the child would only pretend to learn through the momentary fear of pain or punishment, but as soon as this prospect dissipated would simply do as it wished because of their inability to even "know what it is to be at fault" (Rousseau 1979: 92).

⁴³⁹ The seamlessness of a child's connection to the world even goes so far that, as with Rousseau's view of natural man, the child "does not even sense his own existence" (Rousseau 1979: 74).

Rousseau terms "negative education."⁴⁴⁰ As a consequence of the child's lack of ego, the only legitimate form of education would have to be one based around necessity in their coming to accept the "rules" of reality, through experience informing them that the world cannot be any other way than how it is. Negative education secures the child from the error and vice that can only come from social things.^{441 442 443} As the child confronts nature directly he will quickly begin to realize that it does not conform to his dictates or desires and that it is pointless to wish that the world was something other than what it is. He will learn simply as does the animal by viewing the world as an extension of his own sensations "according to whether they are pleasant or unpleasant to us" (Rousseau 1979: 40). These limitations engendered as they are by reality rather than, as is typical of education, by conventions created by human beings operating within the arbitrariness that is society, Rousseau maintains, will consequently come to be accepted unconditionally by the child. This is because they will be backed by the unassailability of reality itself rather than by the capriciousness of human conduct, the unfathomable will of the other. The child who is raised appropriately will not view themselves as a tool by which to win or lose the support of others in satisfying socially constructed needs.^{444 445} In this way, he will be

⁴⁴⁰ In his words such an education will consist "not at all in teaching virtue or truth but in securing the heart from vice and the mind from error" (Rousseau 1979: 93).

⁴⁴¹ It seeks to purge to as great an extent as possible "the environment of all vestiges of the social as it is understood by conventional opinion" (Parry 2001: 252).

⁴⁴² The Tutor will shield Emile from all that would interfere with his own ability to learn from nature. He will teach only to the extent that he does not teach, with the aim of enabling Emile's faculties to develop on their own initiative through interaction with the world, rather than by the human constructs that arise from society (Damrosch 2007: 333).

⁴⁴³ He will realize that the stove is hot after touching it once and so be wary of it thereafter. As Rousseau writes, "do not give your pupil any kind of verbal lessons; he ought to receive them only from experience" (Rousseau 1979: 92).

⁴⁴⁴ Rousseau famously gives the example of a child's tears to demonstrate that the typical upbringing of children draws them away from nature and into the corruption that is society, undermining their potential for contentment and happiness through unrealistic fantastical expectations of what life has to offer which mirror the self-absorption of social man. The child's cries at first out of frustration on account of the absence of what it needs, and so has its first inklings of the independence of the world from its own desires. The child's first inclination to other human beings, claims Rousseau, is to love the adults who minister to its cares. Yet the child's omnipotent view of reality quickly intercedes on his love; he comes to understand that others around him have the power to both provide or withhold his wants through the effect of his tears and so identifies human beings rather than nature with the satisfaction or frustration of his desires. "From these tears that we might think so little worthy of attention is born man's first relation to all that surrounds him; here is formed the first link in that long chain of which the social order is formed" (Rousseau 1979: 65). Tears, which clearly cannot influence the availability of the things that the child wants in themselves, nevertheless influence the behaviour of the human beings who seem to control these things, and so become a social means of satisfying desire. As Bloom writes, the child comes to recognize that the human world is changeable in a way that nature is not and "quickly learns that; for his life, control over men is more useful than adaption to things" (Bloom 1979: 11).

⁴⁴⁵ To have a correct understanding of himself and nature he must be left to his own devices; he must be shielded to as great an extent as possible by those around him from the deceptions that come with acculturation, from a

shieleded from any lapse into the unreal parallel world of second nature created by culture which acts as a barrier to understanding an individual's limitations vis-à-vis nature.

The Tutor, the unnamed figure who directs Emile's education, will never portray himself as the master of the child but will always simply enable him to fulfill his needs through his own volition. He will never refuse a request out of a belief that it was incorrect or unwarranted but only with disdain on the basis of it being against the very nature of existence itself. Emile will not act out of a false sense of modesty or affection to try and secure his Tutor's favour. His hunger will not lead him to try to cajole, harass, or bargain with his guardian in the belief that he controls the food supply.⁴⁴⁶ If he breaks the furniture or whatever else, the Tutor will let Emile feel the negative effects that result from his actions: "do not hurry to replace it for him. Let him feel the disadvantage of being deprived of it" (Rousseau 1979: 100). And in this way Emile will become "patient, steady, resigned, calm, even when he has not got what he wanted" (Rousseau 1979: 91). The aim in all of this is for Emile to be at peace with himself by being at peace with the world and so to get around the contradictions and unnecessary dissatisfactions embedded in the life of social man. And in the same way, the Tutor also manipulates situations to initiate Emile into understanding abstract concepts, such as property rights, through direct experience. This is evident in the episode of Emile unknowingly sowing beans in a gardener's field. When Emile returns to find his plot destroyed, his initial anger at the gardener turns into regret once he realizes that it was he who in the original instance had actually destroyed the gardener's work. As Rousseau writes, "in this model of the way of inculcating primary notions in children one sees how the idea of property naturally goes back to the right of the first occupant by labor. That is clear, distinct, simple, and within the child's reach. From there to the right of property and to exchange there is only a step" (Rousseau 1979: 98-99).^{447 448}

It is only in cases in which direct example cannot be made that one ought to resort to words, claims Rousseau, because experience is the natural way to learn since it is independent of

disastrous "self-instrumentalization in the interests of satisfying an exaggerated need for self-esteem" (Horowitz 1987: 223).

⁴⁴⁶ As Rousseau famously writes, "the phrase 'there is no more' is a response against which no child has ever rebelled unless he believed that it was a lie" (Rousseau 1979: 91).

⁴⁴⁷ This understanding, once again, is inculcated by necessity rather than through teaching in the conventional style that had it been utilized, Rousseau asserts, "would have been forgotten the very next day" (Rousseau 1979: 178).

⁴⁴⁸ Similarly, Emile is taught about the importance of knowing the cardinal directions in relation to navigation through getting lost in the forest at dusk (Rousseau 1979: 179-182). The Tutor alleviates Emile's panic as night closes in by guiding him through a series of leading questions to an understanding of the rudiments of navigation.

social obfuscations.⁴⁴⁹ In order to teach the facts of nature man's representations of it, rooted as they are in man's relationships with one another, must be avoided at all costs the "thing rather than its sign is to be shown" (Parry 2001: 257). And for this reason, the first and only book that Emile will read in his childhood is Robinson Crusoe. This is not as some have claimed, including Marx himself, because Rousseau would seek to make him into some sort of idealist who builds the world purely through his own volition (Rousseau 1979: 184). This would completely undercut the emphasis that Rousseau's theory consistently places on the importance of society. Rather Robinson Crusoe is used as the paramount example of naturalistic man because, out of the necessity of survival, he judges the world purely on the basis of its utility, dispensing, as a result of his isolation, with any of the impediments that society erects to its correct understanding.⁴⁵⁰ The point is for Emile is to approach the world in the most self-sufficient, utilitarian way, that is possible in order that he may be freed of the deception that accompany social man's self-interested relationship to the natural world.⁴⁵¹ It is for this reason also that Emile will learn a practical trade, carpentry, to bring him closer to nature and away from the obfuscations of society. A trade will serve the double purpose of also making him more self-reliant. Emile will work with his hands so as to avoid the pitfalls of intellectual labour whose value is tied to opinion and social status rather than to material worth.⁴⁵²

Rousseau's aim in all of this is for Emile to perceive reality as a fulfillment or expression of his own desire rather than, as is the case for social man, as something against which he must strive to fulfill his needs (Rousseau 1979: 208).⁴⁵³ Emile will be as close to natural man as is possible for a human being because his education, his gradual discarding of that which is beyond

⁴⁴⁹ This is also because Rousseau believes in Lockean fashion that "everything which enters into the human understanding comes there through the sense; this sensual reason serves as the basis of intellectual reason" (Rousseau 1979: 125).

⁴⁵⁰ "The surest means of raising oneself above prejudice and ordering one's judgements about the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man and to judge everything as this man himself ought to judge of it with respect to his own utility" (Rousseau 1979: 185).

⁴⁵¹ "The only legitimate action is action based not on a pre-existing culture or tool-making tradition but on intact nature" (Starobinski 1988: 230). This is because it "resembles the action of the first man inventing the first tool. Such an act of creation ex nihilo is entirely my own; it does not depend on the past history of the human race. Our actions should wholly belong to us, and therefore we should not use any instrument that we cannot construct ourselves. We should not use tools that are given to us, because we do not want our actions linked to those of our predecessors... Labor makes the artisan independent, but technology ties us to tradition, to institutions, and above all to other men, who make our tools and complete our work" (Starobinski 1988: 231).

⁴⁵² Emile's emphasis on the practical utility of objects, his disdain, or ignorance, of status symbols, will mean that he regards a "candymaker" as more important than the "whole Academy of Sciences." Goldsmiths for him will be nothing but "loafers" who play "useless games" (Rousseau 1979: 187).

⁴⁵³ Emile will count "on himself alone," amour-propre "is still hardly aroused in him" (Rousseau 1979: 208).

the ability of nature to deliver as a simple impossibility, will cause him to unconditionally accept what it throws at him. But Emile will do more than this. In a manner of speaking, he will take nature into himself, erasing as much as possible the distinction between the two.⁴⁵⁴ His expectations do not exceed what he believes to be possible, and for the same reason he does not perceive what we would consider to be adversity or ill fortune, as resulting from the actions of nature, to be something negative, something against his interest. Emile's education has left him so aligned with nature that he will not simply be resigned to whatever fate throws at him but instead will accept it because he perceives it as intertwined with his own sense of self. The Tutor will endeavour to balance Emile's desire with his capability because it is only in this way that the soul will "remain peaceful and that man will be well ordered" (Rousseau 1979: 80). Emile will perceive his own actions in a way akin to the immediacy of natural man's existence. Their seeming unavoidability, the absence of illusory possibilities constructed by a corrupt society for its own purposes, will deliver him from any sense of contradiction or incompleteness. He will not simply be resigned to whatever fate throws at him but, instead, will accept it because he perceives it as intertwined with his own sense of self. In the same way deceiving others in his experience provides no benefit and so Emile will never lie or feign tears because he has no conception of falsehood.⁴⁵⁵ Emile will also very rarely partake in outward displays of emotion, for these are designed for the consumption of other people and often serve to mask the feelings of the self. The disappointments that accompany the imaginary life of social man will be foreclosed by a commitment to the limits of the real world as it is the difference between the two that Rousseau asserts "make us truly unhappy" (Rousseau 1979: 81). Once again, this feeling of oneness with reality is aided by the fact that the Tutor has not coerced Emile into this position. He has come to choose conformity to nature of his own volition because his education has led him to see it as the only course of tenable action (Horowitz 1987: 249).

The second phase of Emile's education begins as he reaches the age of reason, which once again Rousseau believes starts at around the age of twelve, when he is first able to understand how his actions impact those around him. As with his exposure to nature, concepts relating to other people, at their earliest stages, are taught to Emile viscerally. In this way,

⁴⁵⁴ He will acquire a realistic grasp of what nature is, his unrealistic fantasies will be "relinquished naturally as the child is offered and becomes capable of realistic modes of satisfaction" (Horowitz 1987: 233).

⁴⁵⁵ His speech will be characterized by "only the naive and simple truth, unadorned, unaffected, without vanity. He will tell you the bad things he has done or thinks just as freely as the good, without worrying in any way about the effect on you of what he has said" (Rousseau 1979: 160).

Rousseau believes, that his natural pity, and eventually, as we shall soon see, his all important recognition of conscience, will be unleashed without the danger of any system maintaining, self-serving, philosophy intruding. Interestingly, it is through the first stirrings of adolescent sexual desire that Emile learns that he is capable of feeling compassion for other human beings.⁴⁵⁶ Love shows Emile in the most immediate of ways that he is capable of extending cares formerly only associated with himself beyond the confines of his own being. This is followed by Emile's exposure to society through his encounter with the suffering.⁴⁵⁷ Emile's authentic sadness at human misery—up to this point he has been protected from false emotions foisted on men by society—will cause him to realize that he possesses natural pity. He will feel pleasure at his ability to sympathize with others and finally happiness or relief when he realizes that his own life is not subject to their cares, thereby inculcating within him the awareness that he has extended himself emotionally to other people, even when the context is completely "superfluous to our well-being" (Rousseau 1979: 229). In this way Emile will first come to recognize that his own happiness is tied to the well-being of others: "I am interested in him for love of myself, and the reason for the precept is in nature itself" (Rousseau 1979: 235). The selfish love of *amour-propre*, the desire not to feel the unhappiness associated with the suffering of another, will thereby be transformed into something beneficial.⁴⁵⁸

These first inklings about the importance of other people for the self will be reinforced by Emile's reading of history. To begin to understand society without being fatally immersed in it, to avoid social corruption, Emile will turn to the past.⁴⁵⁹ A disinterested immersion in history will allow Emile to discover, as the bourgeois with his idealist illusions cannot, that he is culturally dependent on other men and that this is what defines him as a human being. This will be reinforced through the first recognition of the central importance that the Tutor has played in his life. He will come to realize that "man is naturally good" but that society in its current form

⁴⁵⁶ "So long as he loved nothing, he depended only on himself and his needs. As soon as he loves, he depends on his attachments. Thus are formed the first bonds linking him to his species" (Rousseau 1979: 223).

⁴⁵⁷ As Bloom writes, "Emile's first observations of men are directed to the poor, the sick, the oppressed, and the unfortunate... He becomes a kind of social worker" (Bloom 1979: 18).

⁴⁵⁸ Emile will come to realize that "in order not to suffer that I do not want him to suffer" and that the responsibility for this also resides in a natural aspect of his own being (Rousseau 1979: 235).

⁴⁵⁹ He will look upon "men from afar, to show him them in other times or other places and in such a way that he can see the stage without ever being able to act on it" (Rousseau 1979: 237). "Emile would have to understand, first of all, the needs and motives by which other men were driven - needs and motives which drove them out of themselves. Thus an education for authenticity would have to be an education in inauthenticity" (Berman 1970: 183).

"depraves and perverts" him through obliviousness to the importance of the social as owing to a blind submission to self-interest (Rousseau 1979: 237). Emile, by realizing the importance of society for his own humanity, will come to recognize, as was the case with his experience of nature, "the legitimate boundaries placed on self-enactment... by the equal entitlements of other human beings" (Parry 2001: 255).

The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar

Emile is first introduced to ethics and religion through the interlude in the work's fourth book entitled the *Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar*.⁴⁶⁰ It contains the core of his teaching not just on ethics but on the reconciliation with nature and with his own selfhood that Rousseau always fervently believed was within man's capacities. Rousseau does not believe that children are capable of actively believing in religion or in ethical principles until around fifteen, and that before this age, because they are so enthralled by their own existence, that they can merely parrot tenets of faith or morality.⁴⁶¹ As detailed in the Second Discourse, Rousseau maintains that man alone of the animals possesses a will by which he can choose to act on the world unencumbered by instinct or circumstance, and that this is intertwined with a distinct human ability to actively change the material world to suit his interests by virtue of his perfectibility. The most essential avenue opened up through the new horizons that accompany Emile's childhood education will enable him in adolescence not only to have a realistic and contented grasp of nature—and from this to grasp natural pity and the importance and danger of society— but also to understand what most distinguishes him as a human being. The lack of distinction between Emile's will and nature through the elimination of social corruption, will provide him with an unimpeded ability to perceive what his will, and thereby the achievements of his reason, or perfectibility, really are, namely the nature of how these relate to a larger order of existence and to morality. This is because Emile's isolation from society has enabled him to

⁴⁶⁰ The *Profession of the Faith of the Savoyard Vicar*, apparently inspired by Rousseau's own childhood encounter with two Savoyard vicars, one in Turin and the other at Mme de Warens, would prove enormously controversial and would be the catalyst for the vagabond existence that he would lead in his later life.

⁴⁶¹ As he writes about children in his *Letter to Beaumont*, the Bishop of Paris, "you speak to him about an infinite intelligence, he does not know what intelligence is, and he knows even less what infinite is. But you will make him repeat after you the words it pleases you to say to him. You will even make him add, if necessary, that he understands them; because that costs almost nothing, and he prefers saying he understands them to being scolded or punished" (Rousseau 2013(2): 37).

withdraw into his actual self and so recognize the true meaning of his own being by virtue of his isolation from the false opinions of others

The Savoyard Vicar begins by criticizing the confidence displayed by Rousseau's counterparts in man's ability to acquire knowledge of the world by means of reason alone. He claims that he arrived at his philosophy after his search for knowledge resulted in nothing but frustration (Rousseau 1979: 268).⁴⁶² Through the mouth of the Savoyard Vicar, Rousseau asserts that by reflection on his own being man can grasp certain fundamental truths about the nature of reality that have enormous implications for his relationship to it and to other people, and for any potential resolution of otherness that can come from this. These truths are available to personal inspection; they rely on a reason that looks for confirmation within the self as it relates to the external world rather than to one that relies on the opinions of others.⁴⁶³

Rousseau argues that man's awareness of himself as a being with sensation leads to the recognition that the causes of these sensations are beyond the self and that from this an external world exists.⁴⁶⁴ A certainty of one's own existence, in other words, is dependent on a certainty of the existence of the outside world. Next, the Savoyard Vicar reflects on his ability to compare sensations through an active force not found in nature itself. The problem of universals is raised by the fact that sensations present themselves to the body as disparate yet can be moved, transported, and superimposed on one another by the mind (Rousseau 1979: 270).⁴⁶⁵ If matter can relate to itself in the orderly way that the existence of universals seems to necessitate, this indicates that it is not simply the product of mechanical laws, of the type sought by the *philosophes*, since matter being inert would require an outside force or "will" to put it into motion in the original instance.⁴⁶⁶ It is clear also that the motion of nature is not random, since when men look into it, they discover certain laws. This is evident in that individuals cannot

⁴⁶² And indeed Rousseau would write near the end of his life that he had continued to adhere to the set of principles that he outlines in this portion of *Emile* and that they were "the result of my painful seeking" (Rousseau 1979(2): 34; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 3rd Promenade).

⁴⁶³ They come through reading the "book of nature...this great and sublime book," which is "open to all eyes" (Rousseau 1979: 306-307).

⁴⁶⁴ "I clearly conceive that my sensation, which is in me, and its cause or its object, which is outside of me, are not the same thing" (Rousseau 1979: 270).

⁴⁶⁵ Concepts, such as larger and smaller, along with numerical ideas, "certainly do not belong to the sensations" even though they are produced by them, since they by definition transcend particularity (Rousseau 1979: 271).

⁴⁶⁶ As he writes, nature "contains nothing of that liberty appearing in the spontaneous motions of man... there is some cause of its motions external to it... every motion not produced by another can come only from a spontaneous, voluntary action. Inanimate bodies act only by motion, and there is no true action without will" (Rousseau 1979: 273).

simply imagine any order that they wish but must adjust their ideas to regularities that they perceive in reality.⁴⁶⁷ Although the end of this order is invisible to man, its existence is plain because to judge that there is an order it suffices to examine "the parts in themselves, to study their concurrences" (Rousseau 1979: 275).⁴⁶⁸ Rousseau compares this to a watch being opened by an individual who has never seen one before, such a man even if he had no idea of its ultimate purpose would undoubtedly realize that each piece was made to aid the operation of the others. Likewise, every being in the universe can through some connection "be regarded as the common center around which all others are ordered" (Emile 276). And this betrays the fact that this order relies on the ability "to act, to compare, and to choose" all of which "are operations of an active and thinking being" (Rousseau 1979: 275). The order in creation then, along with the need for a first mover, show the Savoyard Vicar that there is a "being" possessing "a will" and "an intelligence" directing inert matter, as if from the outside, and from this he contends to know with certainty that God exists because he can perceive him "everywhere in his works" (Rousseau 1979: 275).⁴⁶⁹

He now makes the claim—essential for understanding Rousseau's reconciliation of man, society, and nature—that man also possesses the qualities that he associates with divinity above. As he writes,

"After having discovered those attributes of the divinity by which I know its existence, I return to myself and I try to learn what rank I occupy in the order of things that the divinity governs and I can examine. I find myself by my species incontestably in the first rank; for by my will and by the instruments in my power for executing it, I have more force for acting on all the bodies surrounding me, for yielding to or eluding their actions as I please, than any of them has for acting on me against my will by physical impulsion alone; and by my intelligence I am the only one that has a view of the whole. What being here on earth besides man is able to observe all the others, to measure, calculate, and foresee their movements and their effects, and

⁴⁶⁷ As the Savoyard Vicar asserts, "I see in the system of the world an order which does not belie itself" (Rousseau 1979: 298). And, interestingly, for this reason Rousseau writes that, in his view, a belief in miracles actually serves to undercut divinity "if many exceptions took place, I would no longer know what to think" (Rousseau 1979: 298).

⁴⁶⁸ Rousseau first put this position forward in his famous *Letter to Voltaire* on the Lisbon earthquake. In it he disputed Voltaire's claims that some events had inconsequential effects "since there is nothing foreign to the universe, everything that happens in it necessarily acts on the universe itself" (Rousseau 1997: 238).

⁴⁶⁹ Or, as he would write soon after the publication of *Emile*, "God manifests himself in his work... he reveals himself to enlightened people in the spectacle of nature" (Letter to Beaumont 41).

to join, so to speak, the sentiment of common existence to that of its individual existence?" (Rousseau 1979: 277).

The Savoyard Vicar maintains, like Augustine, that man's seeming power of volition—since it cannot be explained by the workings of inert matter—reminds him of his connection to something that is not material and thereby spiritual and, conceivably, divine and immortal, since the will is evidently not constrained by the material body, i.e. a sensory immediacy, in which it operates. Man's will, or soul, again as evident in his capacity for pity and conceptual thought, is capable, then, of an expansiveness that is derived from God Himself. An expansiveness that allows man, in the first place, to realize that there is an order in nature, and, in the second, that actually mirrors the volition by which God creates matter and puts it into motion.⁴⁷⁰

The Savoyard Vicar similarly argues that a God of infinite power would never choose to do wrong for this would mean disrupting the harmony that He Himself created.⁴⁷¹ Moreover, an omnipotent being, Rousseau reasons, would do only what was beneficial to Him, and so knowing the good would never stray from it (Rousseau 2013(2): 31).⁴⁷² "He could not be destructive and wicked without hurting Himself. He who can do everything can want only what is good" (Rousseau 1979: 282). And just as God is good, so can man also be good and powerful—that is to say moral—when he abides by the harmony of nature. And likewise man thereby is only free—that is, man only uses his will correctly—when he aligns it with that of God through the harmony of this order rather than to the obfuscations of society, which, as we have seen, destroy his freedom and individuality. Essentially, then, social man's *amour-propre* disrupts the harmony of nature through the corruption that society introduces into reality. Looking back historically to the creation of society, Rousseau claims that man as the creature responsible for otherness, as Augustine also maintained, foolishly confuses the divine order of existence through the misuse of his will to his own detriment. The man in society infected by

⁴⁷⁰ As Grimsley writes, if man "looks within himself, he will also find a 'divine model,' a simulacrum or 'inner energy'—in other words, a spiritual ideal—which can inspire his actions in the world, for this model is grounded in the divine order which governs all things" (Grimsley 1973: 77).

⁴⁷¹ Actions that are disruptive of the order underpinning reality, Rousseau maintains, are a sign of weakness, not of strength. These actions come from attempts to manipulate the order for one's own advantage, something of which an omnipotent being would have no need. Since existence is perfect and self-contained, and is a creation of God Himself, a bad action on His part would be completely pointless. "Goodness is the necessary effect of a power without limit."

⁴⁷² For Rousseau cruelty, wantonness, and selfishness always came from an inadequacy of self, from weakness, rather than simply from the pursuit of self-interest (Berman 1970: 177).

amour-propre uses his will to fall away from himself. In living in accordance with the dictates of the social he becomes inauthentic and nothing, just as Augustine believed that men became nothing by virtue of the misuse of the will in original sin.⁴⁷³

Rousseau writes in *Emile* that everything created good in nature degenerates in the hands of social man. "He forces one soil to nourish the products of another, one tree to bear the fruit of another... He wants nothing as nature made it, not even man; for him, man must be trained like a school horse; man must be fashioned in keeping with his fancy like a tree in his garden." Yet Rousseau continues just after this that "were he not to do this, however, everything would go even worse, and our species does not admit of being formed halfway" (Rousseau 1979: 37). For Rousseau man's ability to construct a conceptual world through his reason is not something to be discarded in favour of a return to immediacy as the romantic interpretation of him would have it; rather, it is an inescapable part of being human. *Emile* will not be a natural man, he will be human but he will be healed, and so capable of using the achievements of his own God given, and therefore good, nature, meaning even reason and the ability to construct concepts, in imitation of God in ways capable of contributing to the order of existence.

As opposed to the selfish *amour-propre* of society, then, man can, according to Rousseau, actually become like a God, or a "King" on Earth, as he puts it, through building a moral order by recognizing what his own will really is and through this by using his own creations to contribute, rather than detract from, the harmonious order of nature. As Kant will later argue in his conception of genius, Rousseau claims that man can perceive an order in nature and thus, uniquely of the animals, impress upon it one of his own, concepts or abstractions derived from the overall unity of existence. In his ability to impose such an order through his concepts, man's will and perfectibility thereby parallel the nature of God's activity. *Emile*, through his liberation from the obfuscations of the social engendered by history and as the truly moral being, will recognize this and use the power of his will and his innate perfectibility—his ability to impose a conceptual order on creation—as a means of contributing to the larger order

⁴⁷³ As Rousseau writes "swept along in contrary routes by nature and by man, forced to divide ourselves between these different impulses, we follow a composite impulse which leads us to neither one goal nor the other. Thus, in conflict and floating during the whole course of our life, we end it without having been able to put ourselves in harmony with ourselves and without having been good either for ourselves or for others" (Rousseau 1979: 41).

in nature that has been constructed by God rather than as a means of detracting from it through falling victim to his own creations, as is the case for social man.⁴⁷⁴

And it is in this ability to actively and morally contribute to God's work, also through his creations, that the saving grace of the misery that man has been made to endure because of his discovery of society can be found (Grimsley 1973: 87-88). This is because it is in this way that man will become something more than what he was in the State of Nature. Man will thereby take his rightful place under God through becoming the creature capable of improving and aiding the order of creation through a wilful submission to it. The parallels to Augustine's Fall of Man from the harmony of his existence in the Garden and his higher redemption, using man's original error to elevate himself to a higher standard, are obvious, as is the ultimate justification that this provides for man's existence despite his great evil. The will here is a product of a soul capable of both recognizing its own potential, through its awareness that it is responsible for the achievements of civilization, and challenging itself by not living simply according to dehumanizing social norms. Emile will, and man in general can and must, return to the harmony that characterized the State of Nature through again orienting his actions, his true self, to the harmony of existence.⁴⁷⁵ Emile's perception of nature and of himself, unobstructed as it is by society, means that he will simply identify his own selfhood with the maintenance of this harmony because he will recognize himself within it. He will comprehend the actuality of his own being in a way unavailable to other people. He will identify his own being with conformity to the order of nature. He will love the world to love himself. Emile will know that he could do the opposite but would never choose this course of action, just as a modern man knows that he could act against his self-interest but would never choose to do so. This is simply because he would not consider himself to be constituted by those things that deny his actual self because his education has given him the opportunity to possess a correct understanding of the

⁴⁷⁴ As Bloom writes, man's return to himself in Emile will incorporate "into his substance all the cumbersome treasures he gathered on route" (Bloom 1979: 4). Emile will, in other words, be a knowing subject because his existence will be cognizant of itself as "the extension of the human spirit developed in history" (Horowitz 1987: 131). But in contrast to the citizen of the *Social Contract*, this self-knowledge of what is best will not stem from self-interest but, as is the case with Emile's nature, will be perceived as an aspect of his own subjectivity.

⁴⁷⁵ As Grimsley writes, "self-love has now acquired a spiritual dimension which has lifted the individual above the appetites of the senses in order to make him aware of the link between the 'love of the soul' and the principle of order" (Grimsley 1973: 69).

correspondence of his own self, via the will and perfectibility, to nature as a whole.⁴⁷⁶ He is not a conditioned automaton as perhaps was the case for the citizen in the Social Contract. Again this is because Emile does not consider himself to be constituted by those things which Rousseau believes deny his authentic self because his education has given him the opportunity to possess a correct understanding of the correspondence of his own self, via the will and perfectibility, to nature as a whole. And Emile, in all of his actions, will orient himself to the order of existence.

The Savoyard Vicar tells Emile that virtue, morality, lies in wilful obedience to the innate principle of natural pity within the self. This recognition of and wilful submission to pity, Rousseau terms "conscience" and identifies with an ability to perceive and abide by the order of existence in interpersonal relation and to judge the actions of the self and others based upon it (Rousseau 1979: 289). As he writes of man in his *Letter to Beaumont* conscience is "a knowledge of order, and it is only when he knows order that his conscience brings him to love it" (Rousseau 2013(2): 28). Or again as Rousseau writes in *Emile*, "Conscience never deceives; it is man's true guide. It is to the soul what instinct is to the body" since to follow it is to follow nature (Rousseau 1979: 286). While society pits natural pity against self-preservation, Emile's upbringing, and the ability to understand the teachings of the Savoyard Vicar that it enables, will re-establish the symbiotic relationship that existed between the two in the State of Nature. However, this will be done at a higher, because conscious and active, unity.

The Savoyard Vicar demonstrates to Emile that conscience emerges both through and in spite of society. While natural man simply loved the good implicitly without possessing knowledge of it, social man can use his reason to actually realize the presence of an innate principle of order within his own faculties and so actively contribute to the harmony of nature (Rousseau 1979: 290). This simply means that knowledge of conscience is not innate even though the sentiment is. Emile has come to know the properties of his will through his shielding from society. Yet he also knows, as demonstrated by the wisdom that he receives from the teaching of the Savoyard Vicar, that social interaction with another person is what allows him to learn and appreciate that this natural faculty, i.e. natural pity, can become "actively supported by the will" and so acquire the moral value of conscience, which is to say of active choice (Grimsley 1973: 62). As Rousseau writes, it is from "the moral system formed by this double

⁴⁷⁶ As the Savoyard Vicar relates, "the good man orders himself in relation to the whole, and the wicked one orders the whole in relation to himself. The latter makes himself the center of all things; the former measures his radius and keeps to his circumference" (Rousseau 1979: 292).

relation to oneself and to one's fellows that the impulse of conscience is born. To know the good is not to love it; man does not have innate knowledge of it, but as soon as his reason makes him know it, his conscience leads him to love it" (Rousseau 1979: 290). And since in its original character conscience is directed at others yet also betokens a love for the order of existence that man must have with nature, the human being, in a sense, learns love of nature from love of people.⁴⁷⁷

The final section of *Emile* deals with his introduction and subsequent marriage, after traveling for two years, to his wife Sophie.⁴⁷⁸ Like a character from one of the romance novels of his childhood, Rousseau writes that *Emile*, not driven by a desire to compare women to one another by virtue of his acceptance of Sophie's love as intertwined with his own, will found his affection "on esteem which lasts as long as life, on virtues which do not fade with beauty, on suitability of character which makes association pleasant and prolongs the charm of the first union in old age" (Rousseau 1979: 475). *Emile*'s ending is of great significance. On its final page *Emile* tells the Tutor that Sophie is pregnant and asks that he raise the child (Rousseau 1979: 480). The meaning of this is clear, in my view, as Rousseau related in the Second Discourse that the family was the first society, so *Emile* and his family represent the founding of a new moral society, a society raised on the Tutor's principles.⁴⁷⁹ *Emile* and his family then constitute a fresh start for a now healed human race, for people who have managed to reconcile the diremption from nature incurred at the primordial discovery of society. And in this context it can also be seen, for those who would seek to make him exclusively into some sort of an anti-rationalist, that if even society itself is redeemable for Rousseau, how much more are its products, concepts and reason.

⁴⁷⁷ In addition to this the will's volition when directed to conform to natural pity in order to become "conscience," since everything above the instinctual is a product of the social, can for Rousseau, in any case, clearly only be developed in society.

⁴⁷⁸ Interestingly this was one of the names of Rousseau's love interest Mme d'Houdentot. Unfortunately, the limitations of this project prevent me from discussing Rousseau's often reprehensible and misogynistic views on women. Rousseau writes for instance that a woman's "dignity consists in her being ignored. Her glory is in her husband's esteem. Her pleasures are in the happiness of her family" (Rousseau 1979: 409).

⁴⁷⁹ Society is redeemable. It "is not wicked because social man lives communally but because the motives that impel men to join together in society inevitably cloud the primordial transparency of presocial existence. Rousseau's hostility is directed against social hypocrisy and the tyranny of opinion, not against society as such" (Starobinski 1988: 44).

Rousseau and Otherness

This leads into the question of whether Emile's alignment with nature indicates that Rousseau wanted to heal man by simply restoring him to the harmony of existence characteristic of the State of Nature. Matthew Simpson maintains that Rousseau's theory is contradictory in that the new man that Emile becomes—at peace with himself, with others, and with nature—is ultimately no better than natural man.⁴⁸⁰ And it begs the question of what the point of the human journey is if all that results at its end is the restoration of man to what he originally was. Simpson argues in this respect that Cassirer's Kantian interpretation of Rousseau (Cassirer 1967) was an attempt to save his work through imbuing man's journey through civilization with a saving grace effected by submission to the moral law. However, as should be obvious from the interpretation of Emile above, and as with the other figures examined in this work, I read Rousseau as Horowitz does, and before him Bloom, in seeing Emile as an attempt to perfect man rather than merely as a means of restoring him to some primordial state.⁴⁸¹ Emile's education saves the achievements of reason and history from the morass of social relations by reorienting them toward an authentic selfhood that operates in harmony with the world.⁴⁸²

As mentioned above, Rousseau believed that God was good, and it follows from this that he also believed, like Augustine, that everything in existence was also good because it was created by God. Further, like Augustine again, Rousseau was of the view that it was consequently the misuse of man's powers rather than the powers themselves that were at the

⁴⁸⁰ As he writes, "here a problem arises" of how Rousseau's perfected man is meaningfully different from natural man in the human sense if he is merely at one with existence, albeit knowingly. This is the question, in other words, of whether for Rousseau "moral freedom is a chimera," of whether Emile as a human ideal would really be innately better than man was in the State of Nature (Simpson 2006: 106).

⁴⁸¹ Starobinski position is that Rousseau's project was an attempt to recapture an immediacy of sorts through the reorientation of man's reason away from self-interest and from this authenticity. "We see clearly the wish for a return to unity, for a restoration of confidence, and for a reestablishment of communication. None of what men have thought and invented would then need to be rejected; everything could be incorporated into the felicity of a life reconciled with itself" (Starobinski 1988: 32). He also argues that when Rousseau was unable to find this immediacy he retreated into a passive resignation, into his own world, and tried to achieve immediacy as best he could in his own self through botany and his reveries. It is important to emphasize here that since the State of Nature precludes choice, man cannot choose through any act of will to return to it. Thus concepts and society cannot be eliminated by man as he now is, but must and can, according to Rousseau, be reformed and perfected to the greatest extent that this possible. While Rousseau was no doubt searching for authenticity and for a solution to otherness as he understood it, the Second Discourse and Emile indicate that he believed immediacy, in the romantic sense, to be an impossibility. On the other hand, if passivity can be equated with a state of immediacy then this is in fact what I believe Rousseau's project was trying to argue for, as I discuss below.

⁴⁸² This provides "the possibility of a reconciliation, in a higher synthesis, of self and other, history and nature, freedom and happiness, reason and passion" (Horowitz 1987: 251).

origin of human problems, of "man's failure to make proper use of his freedom" (Grimsley 1973: 78). A claim to this effect is in fact, significantly, the opening line of *Emile*: "everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man" (Rousseau 1979: 37). For Rousseau, as for the other figures examined in this work, it was man and man alone that was the cause of otherness. As he writes in his Letter to Voltaire, "As for me, I see everywhere that the evils to which nature subjects us are much less cruel than those which we add to them" (Rousseau 1997: 235); or in *Emile*, "It is the abuse of our faculties which makes us unhappy and wicked. Our sorrows, our cares, and our suffering come to us from ourselves. Moral evil is incontestably our own work, and physical evil would be nothing without our vices, which have made us sense it" (Rousseau 1979: 281).⁴⁸³

Rousseau's position was not simply the opposite of Augustine's. He did not simply provide, in contrast to what Melzer argues, "an alternative explanation of the origin of evil that exculpates man by shifting the blame onto society" (Melzer 1990: 17). Rousseau did indeed claim that man was not originally bad, but so did Augustine. For both figures it was man's own actions in a primordial historical event—even if in the creation of society—that was at the root of all human misery and confusion, and so man's experience of the world was redeemable through his conformity to the solution to his own self-induced aberration (Damrosch 2007: 213). In this vein Rousseau even writes in his *Confessions* that he was tempted to frequently shout out of his window when writing the Second Discourse: "Madmen, who ceaselessly complain of Nature, learn that all your misfortunes arise from yourselves" (Rousseau 1954: 362). These are not the words of someone who would simply seek to exonerate man from evil. And in this way, while "Rousseau's philosophy is essentially optimistic," his views are nonetheless in no way, in contrast to Grimsley's suggestion, "in opposition to Christian tradition," which is just as optimistic, if not far more so as this work has argued, about man's place in the universe and ultimate reconciliation to it (Grimsley 1973: 163).

Man's "remarkable evil," when compared to the rest of existence, as Rousseau would phrase it in the summary of his core ideas in the *Letter to Beaumont*, and parroting Augustine, was clearly an aberration, which, through evident confinement to man alone, must have been

⁴⁸³ And "Our greatest ills come to us from ourselves" (Rousseau 1979: 48); and again, "Let us set down as an incontestable maxim that the first movements of nature are always right. There is no original perversity in the human heart. There is not a single vice to be found in it of which it cannot be said how and whence it entered" (Rousseau 1979: 92).

caused by human action itself. The paramount problem for man then was to know himself to find out what he in fact was. It was man's understanding of himself that held the promise of coming to know externality and so of achieving an inner peace both with the natural world and within the self because it was human actions that were themselves presumed to be the barrier to achieving this. The basis of otherness for Rousseau, the origin point of everything that exceeded man's expectations and awareness, was not a lack of obedience or an inattention to the self, but other people, the social. This was even to the extent that Rousseau argued that man in the State of Nature, in the absence of others, would lack even self-awareness and so exist in a pre-human immediacy in a way akin to the animals.

Emile's education consists in initially suppressing the influence of society to allow his will and desire to align itself with nature and then carefully introducing society to permit his recognition of the connection between his conscience and nature. The historical deformity imposed by society is the cause of man's problem just as the correct orientation to it—undoing the damage caused by its discovery—is the solution. Emile will be shielded from society to obtain a true understanding of his own self *vis-à-vis* nature and from this to ascertain the properties of his will and so its connection to the divine order of existence. He will then use his knowledge of the will when it is attached to natural pity to understand how the order of existence is reflected in his own being through his conscience. All of these elements of the human being—the will, pity, and conscience, which have their basis in nature—are unleashed or fully utilized only in society. This is because society is the gateway to living a truly human existence through developing the power of the will and conscience. As Rousseau writes, Emile "is a savage made to inhabit cities" (Rousseau 1979: 205). Conformity to nature in other words will act as the blueprint for conformity to other men. This is why Rousseau summarizes the Social Contract at the end of Emile because, as just mentioned, Emile will behave in the way that the work sets out, but implicitly, as a human being truly reconciled to his existence. Emile will live the life of the citizen, not because he has been conditioned to do so, but because he identifies it with his own being since he has obtained the correct orientation to society. And living the life of the citizen will also allow Emile to lift the veil of nature through surmounting the barrier to its proper understanding imposed by culture. It is rectifying his dealings with other men, then, that is Rousseau's ultimate goal because, as he shows in his Second Discourse, society is something that is inescapable for human life; it is the thing, rather than nature itself, that must truly be reckoned

with if "salvation" is to come, as the Tutor's meticulous management of its influence on Emile's childhood demonstrates. And in this way, and against some of his detractors, it is the philosophical implications of Emile rather than its usefulness as a treatise on education that is meant to be of value to the reader: "even though my entire method were chimerical and false, my observations could still be of profit" (Rousseau 1979: 34).

As Grimsley writes of Rousseau's assumption about solving otherness, he "did not think that conflict and division were necessary to human existence; in his view it was possible to bring all the essential aspects of man's 'original' being into unity and harmony" (Grimsley 1983: 185). The fundamental problem—the otherness against which the Enlightenment was unable to deal—was society and the effect on the individual of living with other men and all that goes along with this, namely ethics, acculturation, and the reason for men to come together to live socially at all. As we have seen, the awareness of this shortcoming resulted from a whole host of factors that were becoming increasingly evident in Rousseau's time, including urbanization, state formation, colonisation, exploration, capitalism, the growing perception that religious belief reflected culture, the decline of superstition in favour of viewing the world as man made, and many more. While the Enlightenment's egoism may not have caused these factors, it was nonetheless unable to deal with them. This is because it inherited a view of man that perceived his agency in completely autonomous and idealistic terms. As Crocker writes, the failures of an unimpeded egoism to deal with the social meant that as the Enlightenment progressed it became increasingly "no longer easy really to believe in an autonomous power to create the self" (Crocker 1963: 335). Rousseau's solution to the problem of otherness was a response to the blind spots and pitfalls against which the Enlightenment's view of man inherited from Petrarch was unable to contend. And just as with the other figures examined in this work, his adoption of the problematic of his contemporaries as the basis of his own theory, because of his assumption that it was solvable, served only to replicate the restriction of man that this problem embodied.⁴⁸⁴ Again, for emphasis, this is a foundation built upon a reduced view of human potential because it reflects the handicap, the restrictions of man incurred through the failings of the previous system, with which egoism was unable to contend.

⁴⁸⁴ In Starobinski's words Rousseau was continually preoccupied by "the failure to establish any satisfactory relationship with external reality. Rousseau desired communication and transparency of the heart" (Starobinski 1988: XII). And again, Rousseau "calls upon us to will a restoration of transparency (reconciliation with external reality), both for ourselves and in our lives" (Starobinski 1988: 13).

The Enlightenment wanted man to actively conform to nature through his own activity, to will his own alignment to what was natural and harness it, as it were, to ends arrived at through consensus and reasoned discussion. But it ran into trouble when it could not accommodate the pacifying effect that society has on man's agency and how this in turn seemed to separate him from nature. As we have seen the valorization of the self in the writings of Petrarch and his successors meant that they could not conceive of the human world as the product of anything other than individual effort. Society served in their minds merely to amplify human achievement through cooperation and was not, as Rousseau was to discover, the actual basis of it. Rousseau, critiquing theories of human behaviour as motivated by self-interest or on knowledge as formed by sensation alone, creatively looked back to the State of Nature and made the individual's orientation to society the paramount consideration. He arrived at this solution primarily through using history as a creative impetus for his discovery, through locating the origins of the problem in the emergence of society on man's departure from the State of Nature. And rather than try to reconcile the phenomenon of society with the old view of man as a free agent, as the proponents of self-interest had done, Rousseau accepted the challenge posed by society along with many of the other tenets of the Enlightenment and moved on from these into new territory to construct a whole new concept of man. Otherwise Rousseau's critique would not have been able to offer an alternative view of the self or an explanation of otherness. It would have fallen on deaf ears and would have been unintelligible as an expression and resolution of the angst that confronted his time.

In this way the bewilderment of the *philosophes* in the face of Rousseau's claims can be explained by the combination of their intense similarity to him in belief yet total difference in implication. Feeling a deep sense of victimization at the hands of the Enlightenment's view of man, of the problems that accompanied a rabid individualism, he was uniquely positioned to seize, essentially, on the apparent passivity of man's agency in the face of society to make it the basis of his own ideas, to untangle the "deep-seated malady which was hidden from most of his contemporaries" (Grimsley 1983: 19). Rousseau was the first to realize that society was not simply an amalgamation of human wills but functioned as a second nature that served to obscure the workings of both original nature and of human beings themselves. He realized, moreover, that society was synonymous with being human as opposed to the immediacy of the animal and that it was society that had to be reckoned with by human beings to come to terms with nature

and the self. It is important to note though that for Rousseau, as opposed to what was the case for the next figure that will be taken up in this work, the self was dependent on culture, while culture was not tied in any way to biology, but was autonomous from it.⁴⁸⁵ He thereby took up what man had been allotted by the problem of society itself, i.e. the inability to accommodate social forces, and projected it onto his new view of human action.

Society in Rousseau's conception has a quasi-existence or quasi-agency. It influences man as if it were a thing, yet it is clearly an achieved characteristic because it is a product of human actions. As Rousseau writes in the *Second Discourse*, he "proved" that society was "not man's original state" and that it alone "changes and corrupts all our natural inclinations" (Rousseau 1997: 187). Man is born into society as the animal is born into nature.⁴⁸⁶ This constitutes a restricted view of man's potential overall, a lesser reconciliation if you will, when compared to the Godlike view of man's activity in Petrarch. Petrarch's human ideal of cultural elitism would, in Rousseau's terms, be inauthentic and rendered actually passive as the unwilling dupe of social forces. Instead, man can only have a measure of agency when he solves the problem of society through conformity to what society disguises, nature, and through this to his true self and to other men. Rousseau's view allots less to man and lowers his expectation of what he can hope to achieve, not true identity with all of creation, as for Augustine, or a Platonic self-impelled ascendance through an autonomous selfhood to the eternal, as for Petrarch. It is evidently only an adjustment to the order of nature, simple adherence to nature and, all importantly, to society as a second nature. It is certainly a more mundane solution—one not at all metaphysical and less ambitious—to man's problems in comparison to the other figures. It is one that relies to a greater degree on what is self-evident in experience. Man is bound or locked into something over which he as a man plays less of a role, but on which his manhood nevertheless itself depends.

Rousseau's objective, as he described it, was to put "power and will in perfect equality" (Rousseau 1979: 80). Like a modern day Stoic, Emile must not extend his "faculties" so as to become unhappy through encountering disappointment (Rousseau 1979: 80). Bad things will still occur to him by corrupted social man's own determination, sickness, hunger, death, etc., but

⁴⁸⁵ As he writes, "the man who is not yet of any country will adapt himself without difficulty to the practices of any country whatsoever, but the man of one country can no longer become the man of another" (Rousseau 1979: 151).

⁴⁸⁶ "The farther we are removed from the State of Nature, the more we lose our natural tastes; or, rather, habit gives us a second nature that we substitute for the first to such an extent that none of us knows this first nature any more" (Rousseau 1979: 151).

Emile will not perceive these things in a negative manner. This position must be contrasted to Augustine's human ideal wherein the bad in life would no longer occur because it would be revealed as really part of the good. Augustine viewed the miseries of human existence, in other words, as genuine evils to be used ultimately to bring about the good, whereas for Rousseau they are simply to be conceived of as being different and are not truly bad even in an immediate sense. The implication of Rousseau's solution to otherness is that man only has agency or authenticity when he obtains the correct orientation to society—not in spite of society—and his relationship to nature in the state of nature is not active but passive. Starobinski makes precisely this point in his *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*. Rousseau, as he puts it, "senses guilt in any action in which he is forced to confront an external world that he does not control... Action entails consequences beyond our control and possibly foreign to our intentions" (Starobinski 1988: 249). Man cannot control reality without falling victim to the falsity that accompanies feelings of superiority and so slavery to human creations. His only hope is to relinquish agency entirely, thus agency is equated with the attempt to control externality and its failure. Initiative on the part of man beyond the limits of what nature proscribes opens the door to evil, i.e. with the world of human creation that in its relationship to reality is partial and so inextricably beyond man's understanding. Sin here "takes the form of openness to the outside world, of difference" (Starobinski 1988: 249).⁴⁸⁷

Rousseau's view of salvation is thus completely centered on conformity, the acceptance of that which is beyond man's control, both in society and nature, in the hope that from this attitude man would become a more authentic self. Achieving such a disposition relies fundamentally on adopting an attitude of acceptance, indeed of passivity, in terms of the self's

⁴⁸⁷ This is why at the end of his life Rousseau would retreat into himself and attempt to find the macrocosm in the microcosm, the solution to man's troubles that he had argued for in Emile in his own experience alone. Because of disappointments Rousseau's consciousness would "no longer knows anything outside itself... Access to reality is cut off by insurmountable obstacles. Since things are all against him, Rousseau thrusts himself into a world in which the self has no antagonists. Having surrendered to the sentiment of existence, consciousness savours its singularity, in which it thinks it finds compensation for the unity that reality will not yield" (Starobinski 1988: 261). And indeed, as Starobinski persuasively argues, in his fixation on botany and work as a copyist in his later years can be detected the passive relationship to nature, at a personal level, that he set out in Emile. These are actions that do not commit the original sin of man's attempt to go beyond himself, by attempting to be more than what he ought to be given the limitations of his own nature. "Both involve tasks limited to the assertion of identity. Rousseau identifies plants and recognizes the types described by Linnaeus; he transcribes, from one sheet of ruled paper to another, identical lines of music. The work is salutary, but the mind's only obligation is to serve as the transparent medium whereby a fragment of reality is copied without alteration. Actions they are, but not actions that bring anything new into the world" (Starobinski 1988: 235). "The body is active, but that activity is experienced as passivity" (Starobinski 1988: 234).

relation to reality.⁴⁸⁸ As he writes in *Emile*, "The real world has its limits; the imaginary world is infinite. Unable to enlarge the one, let us restrict the other, for it is from the difference between the two alone that are born all the pains which make us truly unhappy... Man is very strong when he is contented with being what he is; he is very weak when he wants to raise himself above humanity" (Rousseau 1979: 81). For Rousseau also, then, just as for the other figures, human actions only have meaning, only possess reality, when they are used as a means to an end, aiding the harmony of existence. Moreover, just as with the other figures, the emphasis on a total overriding end necessitates that means and ends are one in the same, that is to say that the way in which the harmony of existence is secured is by using it to bring itself about.

Passivity and acceptance, to "acquiesce in the order that this Being establishes" (Rousseau 1979: 292), are in fact the only ways by which to achieve an authentic form of selfhood, through conformity to others and to nature in the context of God's universal order. And for Rousseau this alignment to nature and morality clearly means conforming to something that binds him through its very naturalness rather than as Petrarch would have maintained imposing, or overcoming, this something through an act of pure will.⁴⁸⁹ Under such a conception of salvation there can be no second guessing because there can be no regret that things should have gone any other way. As Kelly writes, salvation for Rousseau, even if never an inevitability, is nonetheless a real possibility and consists in "an attempt to substitute the historical pattern of corruption for the natural pattern of birth, growth, and decline" (Kelly 2001: 22). Nevertheless, this is still a form of salvation, a problem free existence in Rousseau's terms,

⁴⁸⁸ Berman writes that Rousseau wanted to increase man's capacities not decrease them, "his advice often sounded like exhortation to contract the horizon of human possibility and withdraw into oneself. Indeed, as he grew older, and more isolated, Rousseau came more and more to feel that way... One of the central themes of *Emile*, however, was that the limits of man's powers actually extended much further than they thought" (Berman 1970: 179). Or again "it was the road of self-expansion, not of self-repression, that led to the palace of virtue" (Berman 1970: 181). But it is important to bear in mind that Rousseau is increasing *Emile's* capacities when set against the nothingness of the alienated social man's existence. *Emile's* existence is passive, but it is a passivity that has existence, life, because it is aligned to nature rather than a privation from nature. Berman acknowledges this when he writes that *Emile* would show "modern man how to be more intensely and thoroughly alive than man had ever been before" (Berman 1970: 180).

⁴⁸⁹ And even at the end of his life, living as a pariah in poverty, Rousseau would maintain this faith in the harmony of existence. As he writes, "vain arguments will never destroy the congruity I perceive between my immortal nature, the constitution of this world, and the physical order I see reigning in it. In the corresponding moral order, whose arrangements I discovered by my seeking, I find the supports I need to endure the miseries of my life. In any other arrangement I would live without resource and die without hope. I would be the most unhappy of creatures. Let me hold then to this one, which alone suffices to render me happy in spite of fortune and men" (Rousseau 1979(2): 35; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 3rd Promenade).

and it is this underlying optimism, even in the wake of his profound negativity about the nature of man in civilization, that made him so attractive to his contemporaries when juxtaposed with the ironic detachment of the *philosophes* (Shklar 2001: 154). In this he offered the reader the "image of a new man and new world... beyond the essentially rational and intellectual outlook of the Enlightenment" (Grimsley 1983: 180).

But just as man must conform to society correctly because it holds the key to unlocking and accepting original nature, so the otherness to which man must try to conform, and perhaps can uniquely appreciate, reflects this diminished view of man. Nature is here simply a reflection of what man takes himself to be, not in the sense that he can necessarily hope to understand it in its entirety but in that it simply is what it is once the blinders imposed by society are relinquished. The problem that needs to be solved and the way that it is solved, in Rousseau's case society, reflects a view of otherness that casts it merely as what society has served to obscure, i.e. nature's operation as what society disguises rather than simply everything beyond man, as we have seen was Augustine's conception of it. As with man's authentic nature, nature here is driven forward by a harmonious totality. It is essentially inert and its non-human creations are nothing more than "machines," as Rousseau repeatedly calls them, and so lack any internal dynamism, as Augustine also maintained, relying on God and, vicariously through His example, man to put them into motion. This view of nature reflects the linking of the subject's understanding to natural forces in the Enlightenment, yet establishes it on a new footing, one where man is a part of its overall harmony rather than the active force capable of harnessing it via reason to his own advantage. Rousseau here is completely distrustful of metaphysics or of anything that is not tangible. As he would write near the end of his life of the motivations behind his body of work, "I knew that human understanding, circumscribed by the senses, could not embrace them (reality) in their full extent. I therefore limited myself to what was within my reach, without getting myself involved in what went beyond it" (Rousseau 1979(2): 38; *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* 3rd Promenade). And indeed for Rousseau, I would argue, there is nothing that is really metaphysical at all, nothing outside nature and its order, of which God and man's soul are merely spiritual counterparts or active principles. For Rousseau, then, otherness is overcome not through some sort of complete reconciliation with all of existence, as for Augustine, or through becoming part of the eternal, as for Petrarch, but in simply living a natural existence.

Summary

Emile, as the full circle resolution of the problem of society that Rousseau had posed at the beginning of his literary career, marks the end of the most important feature of Rousseau's life and thought in the context of this work and as such its examination of his later years will be brief. As indicated, *Emile* was to be the last of his writings. However, the *Profession of the Faith of the Savoyard Vicar* immediately attracted immense, and from his perspective, completely unwarranted controversy.⁴⁹⁰ Rousseau received word in the evening on June 9, 1762, that *Emile* had been burnt earlier in the day in Paris and that on the grounds of sacrilege, a condemnation of that work and of the *Social Contract*, as well as a warrant for his arrest, had been issued by the city's Parlement. At midnight he and Therese set out from Clichy for the West of France intending to cross the border into his native Switzerland. But on his way to Geneva he was informed that *Emile* and the *Social Contract* had already been condemned and burnt in that city on June 18th (Rousseau 1954: 545). A warrant of arrest was issued there also and as a result Rousseau would renounce the Genevan citizenship that he so greatly treasured (Rousseau 1954: 563). He would spend his next five years as a fugitive travelling throughout Europe in search of a safe-haven, both in the physical and mental sense, and the remainder of his life largely overcome by paranoia and anxiety about what he would come to perceive as a wideranging conspiracy on the part of the intellectual establishment to discredit him. As he would later write of his departure in the *Confessions*, "Here begins the work of darkness in which I have been entombed" (Rousseau 1954: 544). During this time Rousseau even became well acquainted with David Hume, with whose aid he sought refuge in England for a year.

It was in England that Rousseau began to work seriously on his autobiography, the *Confessions*, a work that I have referred to above on numerous occasions. It was intended as an apologetic for posterity, as "a witness in my favour that will sooner or later triumph over the machinations of men" (Rousseau 1954: 525). And it is revealing that while Augustine's

⁴⁹⁰ Rousseau had anticipated that this portion of *Emile* would be construed by the public as a defence of religion against the scepticism of the *philosophes*. As he writes, it was "intended to combat modern materialism" (Letter to Beaumont 75). He thought that the tenets of *Emile* were contained in the New Testament itself and was amazed therefore when readers took great offence to the statements in the work that argued for the underlying relativism of content and value in all systems of religious belief (Letter to Beaumont 72). In *Emile* Rousseau also directly attacked the believability of Christianity by questioning why God would have seen fit to reveal himself to only a portion of mankind and cast dispersions on the divinity of Christ in pointing out that He was not even worshipped in the city in which He "died" (Rousseau 1979: 304-305).

Confessions was addressed to God and Petrarch's *Secretum* to another man, Rousseau's work would be directed at society as a whole as a self-justification of his life and thought. The *Confessions* was written in two parts and covers the time from his birth to Rousseau's departure to England. It is an attempt by Rousseau to show how the factors that had transpired in his life had corrupted him and yet allowed him to arrive at an understanding of the social nature of this corruption. This confession would draw the opposite implication to Augustine's in that it would show that man was naturally good and that it was society that had made him bad. Rousseau, as mentioned previously, came to see his life as exceptional—as a confluence of events that had perhaps endowed him with a singular insight into the nature of society, one that obligated him to share his perspective with other men. He endeavoured in the *Confessions* to present a true history, an authentic portrait of his life, one which would show without concern for social convention everything that had formed him.⁴⁹¹ The work would detail why Rousseau was different from other men and why he was "made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different" (Rousseau 1954: 17). And in writing such a work Rousseau was conscious, as he writes, that "I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once complete, will have no imitator" (Rousseau 1954: 17).

The entirety of the *Confessions* is related to Rousseau's interactions with other people. Within it there is not a situation described that is not interpersonal in nature or linked to others in a definite way. Yet in the wake of all of this Rousseau endeavours to show in the work that he has retained his natural goodness, that in the corrupted world of social man he is incredibly flawed yet is still the best of men because he has lived in a way that resembles the innate, entirely self-absorbed, goodness of primitive man (Rousseau 2013: Kelly intro XXI). As Kelly suggests, Rousseau wants the reader to take from the *Confessions* the impression that he has not sought to fulfill his needs at the expense of others, that he has not actively tried to use others to satisfy his desires, but that rather his naïveté, his childlike desire for approval and affection, his continual fixation on himself, has often left him vulnerable to those who would actively deceive and manipulate others for their own ends (Rousseau 2013: Kelly intro XXV-XXVI). It is this—the peculiarity of his life and character, his vulnerability etc.—that has allowed him to discover

⁴⁹¹ As he writes, "I should like in some way to make my soul transparent to the reader's eye... to contrive that none of its movements shall escape his notice, so that he may judge for himself of the principle which has produced them" (Rousseau 1954: 169).

the truth about man's real nature, because Rousseau himself is a sort of man of the State of Nature living in society. This does not mean that he is moral in the way that Emile is. Rousseau never suggests in the *Confessions* that his life is "good" in this sense; rather, one gets the impression that Rousseau has not cared about others in the way that a moral man should and that this self-absorption has often been hijacked by the inescapable interpersonal relationships that characterize the life of man in society, leaving Rousseau open to the abuse and misuse of his more cunning contemporaries.⁴⁹²

Thus while some have found in the *Confessions* an obnoxious attempt by a self-serving man to escape all responsibility for his actions, it is important to understand that the work was not meant to excuse Rousseau's behaviour by making him the simple victim of society. Rather, the *Confessions* is a demonstration of how Rousseau came to be, through society, and how features of his personality that have made him different have allowed him to retain an understanding of this and have frequently placed him at a disadvantage through his failure, or inability, to live in the way that social men expect him. The contrast here to the other figures that appear in this work concerning the development of the self is clear and revealing. Augustine's conception of the self was arrived at after a long and drawn out quest to find God; Petrarch found his self in the wake of introspective turmoil through allegedly climbing a mountain and by spiritually exerting himself against a hostile nature; while Rousseau demonstrates that his self was established fundamentally, even in small and seemingly pointless ways, *vis-à-vis* his encounters with other people.

Rousseau clearly chose the title of his biography as an allusion to that of Augustine.⁴⁹³ There are also several places in his writing in which literary allusions directly drawn from Augustine are used, such as when he compares the orientation that humans should adopt to the world to that taken by travellers at an inn in his *Letter to Voltaire* on the Lisbon Earthquake, in his story of stealing the asparagus in the *Confessions*, or in, as already indicated, his account of

⁴⁹² As he writes, "After I had discovered or believed I discovered the source of their (human) miseries and wickedness in the false opinions of men, I felt that it was only these very opinions that had made me unhappy myself, and that my ills and vices came to me very much more from my situation than from myself" (Rousseau 2013: 576; *Letters to Malesherbes* 2).

⁴⁹³ As Master and Kelly write in their introduction to the *Confessions*, Rousseau's "choice of a title indicates his intention to replace his predecessor and make his book into the *Confessions*" (Master and Kelly 2013: XXI). This is the point that Ann Hartle also makes in *The Modern Self in Rousseau's Confessions: a reply to St. Augustine*. Rousseau's engagement with Augustine took place primarily through the writings of Blaise Pascal, Bernard Lamy, and the Jansenist theologians popular in the France of his day. For more on this see: (Lee 2001).

his own "conversion" experience. In his three main works Rousseau also relies on a figure who acts in a way analogous to the role played by Christ in Augustine's theology, that of the mediator. Since man is fallen for Rousseau, tainted, as was the case for Augustine, he cannot find his way back to paradise of his own accord, but must be helped or aided by an outside figure, a stand in for God Himself, in the form of Wolmar, the Lawgiver, and the Tutor.⁴⁹⁴ And perhaps the unique circumstances of his life, as just indicated, suggested to Rousseau that he was himself capable of taking on the role of the mediator.

Most importantly, though, Rousseau directly attacks Augustine in several instances for being the originator of the doctrine of original sin, which he portrays as having falsely shifted the blame for man's ills away from society and onto the individual. This is his position in the *Letter to Beaumont*, in which he offers a response to criticisms that the harmony offered by Emile's education would prove fruitless because of original sin and was also an unchristian kind of redemption (Rousseau 2013(2): 29). Rousseau argues here that original sin was an invention of Augustine and of the Church Fathers (Rousseau 2013(2): 29). Rousseau's principal criticism of original sin in itself was that it is essentially autogenetic, since the will was not corrupted prior to the fall. He ridicules Augustine for this inconsistency on several occasions. He attacks him for the notion that sin arose from the will itself, from the act of simply willing to sin, rather than from any actual factor.⁴⁹⁵ For Rousseau this meant that Augustine's entire theology was constructed on a contradiction, because it could account for everything except its own emergence. As we just saw in *Emile* and the *Confessions*, Rousseau wanted to demonstrate that goodness does not come through healing some primordial evil but is innate to human beings as natural creatures, and that morality is thereby an omnipresent possibility affected through managing the corruption of society appropriately. As he writes again in his *Letter to Beaumont*, "I have reasoned in all my Writings... that there is no original perversity in the human heart, and that the first movements of nature are always right" (Rousseau 2013(2): 28).

The *Confessions*, along with the linkages between Rousseau's notion of man's fall, degeneration, and redemption through society to Augustine's discussion of the fall and original

⁴⁹⁴ This position is commensurate with Rousseau's view of history, discussed above, as something unreliable because tainted by the social. It is only through a creative leap into the past that the truth of man's nature can be uncovered, and so a means of rediscovering it.

⁴⁹⁵ As he writes, "we are sinners because of our first father's sin. But why was our first father himself a sinner?" (Rousseau 2013(2): 30). And again, "Original sin explains everything except its own principle" (Rousseau 2013(2): 31).

sin, make it plain that Rousseau was familiar with Augustine's work and that, moreover, his project or "system" was in some degree meant to be a reaction to it. It is not too far fetched to assert that, at the very least, as his project developed, Rousseau began to envision his own work as a means of grounding the origin of evil in something tangible, i.e. society. Rousseau saw, as he indicates, "this principle" as "far more universal" than the doctrine of original sin and so as more accurate because "it illumines even the fault of the first man... you say he is wicked because he was wicked. And I show how he was wicked" (Rousseau 2013(2): 31). In this light Damrosch argues rightly that the similarities between the account of the discovery of society in the Second Discourse and the *City of God* are obvious. Both present an ideal account of man's origin and fall from grace tied to the misuse of the power of will improperly directed to a nefarious love of self, and by highlighting the origin of his problems similarly highlight the "contours of any possible redemption" (Damrosch 2007: 111).⁴⁹⁶

Perhaps, then, Rousseau actually envisioned his work as returning to and improving on the Classical ontological conception of man as a being inevitably intertwined with society. As Shklar writes, and as we saw with his praise of Rome, Rousseau drew from his readings on the ancient world in his youth the "image of the perfectly socialized man, the citizen whose entire life is absorbed by his social role" (Shklar 1969: 13). The greatness of the men of antiquity was evident in his mind in the spirit of self-sacrifice that he had read about in Plutarch, through whose reading he claims that he was "transported to another world with another breed of men" (Rousseau 1953: 162). This was a world that Rousseau believed was constituted by the indivisibility of the individual and the social, and relatedly, of the immoral as being something interpersonal rather than metaphysical, a perspective that Augustine and the Church had undone through the doctrine of original sin. And in this way Rousseau's whole project could be construed, in a sense, as an attempt to replace the doctrine of original sin and everything that accompanies it with his own doctrine of evil as caused by society. This would be a self tied to tangible things, to what the self was actually constituted by, rather than the illusory self of Augustine whose otherworldliness Rousseau always found so contemptible and "anti-social." Rousseau might have even envisioned himself, at least at the end of his life, as a successor to

⁴⁹⁶ As Starobinski writes for Rousseau "The fall is nothing other than the introduction of pride. The equilibrium of the sentient being is destroyed. Man is no longer innocently and spontaneously at one with himself" (Starobinski 1988: 27).

Augustine, in the sense that just as he had enacted a transformative theology in the midst of the end of the Roman Empire, so Rousseau, in the decadence of an age that he considered analogous to it—the *ancien régime*—would endeavour to re-found humanity on a new, more secure, foundation (Melzer 1990: 270).

Rousseau died of a stroke on the morning of July 2, 1778, just four days after his 66th birthday. He had left Paris only two months earlier to stay at the country estate of an admirer of his work, the Marquis René de Girardin, near a town in the northwest of France called Ermenonville. When he met his end he was by no means as friendless as he portrayed himself, yet was a figure who, especially by his own estimation, attracted immense controversy.⁴⁹⁷ Rousseau was entombed on an artificial island on the estate. The existing garden was entirely remade ostensibly with the intention of reflecting the principles of nature elucidated in *Emile*. The pilgrimage to Ermenonville to view the tomb of Rousseau would be made by a veritable who's who of the late eighteenth century including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Georges Danton, and Marie Antoinette.

Just prior to his death Rousseau had made the acquaintance of a young man greatly enthused with his philosophy from the northern French city of Arras named Maximilien de Robespierre. In 1789 Rousseau's ideas—his emphasis on the inseparability of the individual from the social in the form of the citizen—would inspire Robespierre and his Jacobin contemporaries to finally overthrow the *ancien régime* that Rousseau had so detested. Later in the turmoil of the Revolution, like Chairman Mao's Red Book, the *Social Contract* would be printed in pocket form and issued to the soldiers of the French Revolutionary Army. In 1794 the ashes of the Swiss born Rousseau were even transferred, the sixth of the "national heroes" to be canonized in this manner, from Ermenonville to the newly built Pantheon. Thus Rousseau's highly original ideas of man and society in the century to come would exercise an enormous influence on the rise of the nation-states and mass societies that would be its prime features. As Napoleon was reported to have said of Rousseau on visiting his grave, "It would have been better for the peace of France if this man had never lived... It was he who prepared the French

⁴⁹⁷ He was survived by his wife Therese who would live until 1801. She remarried only a year after his death to a servant of the Marquis twenty years her junior with whom she had allegedly been carrying on an affair while Rousseau was still alive. On suffering his stroke Rousseau had apparently badly injured his face. Therese and the Marquis claimed that this was due to a fall from a chair. But as a result of this injury and Therese's remarriage, rumours circulated after Rousseau's death, and even continue to do so today, that he either committed suicide or may have been murdered.

Revolution" (Englund 2004: 460 cited in Damrosch 2007: 351). And while Rousseau's ideas, his optimism about man and society, would prove decisive in France and elsewhere after his death, our next figure was a man whose life was largely defined by his opposition to the world that Rousseau had inspired.

CHAPTER FIVE: Gobineau

Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, in an irony lost least on himself, was born on Bastille Day, July 14, 1816, in the town of Ville d'Avray near Paris. He would grow into a man of much hatred. His life was generally one of disappointment, and his thought was infected with an overpowering nihilism. But the aristocratic attitude that he always tended to affect, and that would earn him many enemies, was balanced by a genuine interest in the human condition. Although clearly less well known than a figure like Augustine or Rousseau, and discredited in a way that they have not been, the nefarious implications of Gobineau's theory would prove decisive to the twentieth century. They are in my view the best example of the full implications of the search for "truth" or certainty on the subject that this work has proposed to study. Consequently, if for all his negativity and pessimism about human life Gobineau might appear a strange addition to the other figures, he must nonetheless be examined. Gobineau's work, for all its great difference in content, nevertheless shares many similarities in form with the other figures and because it perhaps most clearly embodies the nineteenth century's search for a "meta-theory," something which I contend, as will become apparent in the conclusion, is the culmination and legacy of the approach to otherness championed by Augustine, Petrarch, and Rousseau. Gobineau was without doubt the founder of modern day racism but absent from his work is the sense of blind vitriol or triumphalism that would characterize the writings of his successors. A prolific writer of fiction and non-fiction, a poet, and an avid sculptor, Gobineau was a genuinely charming and gifted man of profound cultivation. His life defies the philistinism that we today might associate with racists and racism. In a way intertwined with his own sense of inner doubt and confusion as to his own identity, as to his place in the world, he despised his contemporaries and envisioned himself as immersed in a world characterized by seemingly irreversible decline. Like the others, Gobineau was a man who felt out of place in his own time, who perceived modern life to be a sort of aberration from the norm and so hearkened back to what he took to be better days. It is perhaps too easy today in retrospect, after the plague of racial hatred has been exposed again and again in all its horror, to treat him too lightly, to depict Gobineau, as is often done, simply as an aristocratic poser or fool. But nothing could be further from the case. Unquestionably abominable yet undeniably original, his ideas betray the largely self-taught nature of a thinker who despised the sort of mediocrities that would one day

be put forth in his name. Gobineau, in sum, was simply a man seeking to respond to the problems which characterized his own time, and he would proffer solutions to them that were remarkably similar in structure, scope, and assumptions to the other figures examined in this work.

The Young Aristocrat

Gobineau's mother was born in Martinique. She was the daughter of wealthy plantation owners who claimed descent from an illegitimate son of Louis XV (Herman 2007: 46). His father came from a middle class family originally of the Bordeaux region with pretensions to nobility, the prefix "de" having been added to the family name during the latter half of the *ancien régime* (Boissel 1993: 45). Gobineau's ancestors were royalists and Catholics. They had opposed the French Revolution and Bonaparte and for this his father Louis, who had even been imprisoned during the Empire, had been rewarded at the Restoration with a captaincy in the Royal Guard (Boissel 1993: 47). Gobineau was raised in an atmosphere that disdained the democratic inroads made throughout French society during the Revolution and in its aftermath in the constitutional monarchy of Louis XVIII. This is clear from a treatise that his embittered father wrote at the end of his life which depicted France in the wake of the Revolution as a place destroyed by the greed of the merchant class and at the mercy of the most undesirable elements in society. Gobineau was raised to believe that the Revolution had brought nothing to France but anarchy and a break with tradition that had undermined the viability of the French state, and these preoccupations would continue in all his later writings (Buenzod 1967: 24).

By all accounts he was a sensitive and precocious child growing up in a stable and fairly privileged, if not loving, household. But this life of relative comfort and security disastrously came to an end for the young Gobineau and his family when in the last days of July 1830 the precarious reign of the last of the Bourbons, Charles X, was finally ended by his cousin from the House of Orleans, the "Citizen King" Louis-Phillipe. Not willing to serve the new regime, his father lost his position, with separation from his wife coming soon after (Buenzod 1967: 20). Louis retired to Lorient in Brittany, taking Gobineau's only sibling Caroline, while Gobineau and his mother Anne-Louise, under the influence of his tutor and her lover Charles Sottin de La Coindière, traveled to Inzlingen in Baden (Boissel 1993: 53). La Coindière was infatuated with

the Romantic Movement and he impressed this on Gobineau, whom he had also already taught German (Buenzod 1967: 40-41). Inzlingen, home to a castle accessible only by drawbridge, remained practically unchanged since the High Middle Ages. and Gobineau's time there, while lasting for only a few months, would spur a lifelong devotion to the period (Biddiss 1970: 12). Perhaps seeking to get him out of the way, Anne-Louise then sent the fourteen-year-old Gobineau to a German-language boarding-school in the Swiss town of Bienne (Beasley 2010: 44). He would remain there for two years exhibiting a fascination with the Orient and with feudal Germany (Rey 1981: 59-60), alongside a general disinterest in contrast to what was common among his contemporaries, for the Greek and Roman classics and the ancient world (Rowbotham 1929: 4).

Following the completion of his schooling in Switzerland, Gobineau returned to France to continue his education. He lived with his father and sister, his mother now completely estranged from the family and hardly ever to be seen again (Buenzod 1967: 33).⁴⁹⁸ His father had expected him to follow in his footsteps by embarking on a military career, but this did not interest the young Gobineau. He was more concerned with literature and, in any case, had an aversion to the mathematics that would be necessary for training as an officer in the army (Rowbotham 1929: 5). He dreamed of the East and of Feudalism, envisioning himself as an aristocrat fallen into difficulties, as a member of a family possessed of a die-hard and selfless loyalty to a dynasty that could now give them very little benefit (Boissel 1993: 25). Self-possessed and independent, he maintained a haughty romantic pride and spent much of his time immersed in books (Beasley 2010: 44).⁴⁹⁹

The role that Gobineau's broken home and family background would have on the emergence of his ideas is an interesting one that has oft been commented on. It might not be too much of a stretch to believe that Gobineau was in a way embarrassed by his parents, that, infused with the aristocratic ideals of his education and his father's own self-sacrifice, he felt a gap between expectation and reality, between his own lineage and what he believed it should be (Boissel 1993: 23-25). Race is family by another name for Gobineau and in this way family is

⁴⁹⁸ In later life she would become a source of great embarrassment to Gobineau, apparently supporting herself by means of confidence schemes targeted at the more gullible members of the upper class, and was eventually disowned even by him.

⁴⁹⁹ "Gobineau... wrote out of feelings of extreme alienation... he detested an age that had turned against his aristocratic (racial) lineage and values. In his estrangement, he consoled himself with sad reflections on the impending death of civilization, although there is sufficient narcissism in his own pages to suggest that his own death was also the object - perhaps the true object - of his contemplation" (Davies 1988: 59).

emphasized in all his writings (Smith 1984: 125). He sought "self-legitimation" and a self-identity by contrasting a sense of his own personal excellence with what he considered the debased character of the French population in general. All through his life, he would cling to the idea that he was really a Norman—even though his heritage was in the South—that he was in fact "a son of Odin" and that his family had only relocated from the North to the Bordeaux region within the past few centuries (Barzun 1965: 60).⁵⁰⁰ And in 1879 with his life nearing its close, he would write an elaborate, grandiose, and most would agree, fictitious family genealogy tracing this lineage (Eugène 2000: 11), the *Histoire d'Ottar Jarl, pirate norveigan, conquérant du pays de Bray, en Normandie, et de sa descendance*. As he would somewhat pathetically relate in a letter to his sister from Uppsala "from hence I sprang - I can feel it!" (cited in Biddiss 1970: 229). Deep down, alienation from his actual family might have caused him to feel as if he didn't really belong to any class at all, he might have felt insecure in his own heritage and this could have driven him to develop his racial theory.

As Hannah Arendt pointed out in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Gobineau's conception of race as being wholly responsible for the constitution of the individual essentially rendered the past as completely responsible for, or as inextricable from, the present within the locus of the physiology of man himself via his racial composition. Race could, in other words, provide the certain sense of self, of personal history, that Gobineau, like the other figures examined in this work, felt to be so lacking in his own life. It could do this by giving inner self-perception a "historical significance," by rendering "one's own self" akin to "the battlefield of history," or rather by making the self completely indistinguishable from history (Arendt 1958: 175). As we shall see his racial theory, as it leaves nothing to an individual's will or creativity, perceiving all in human experience as simply a reflection of the racial mixture present in the human body, would have implicitly rendered Gobineau in his own mind, through his identification of his own activity with what was worthwhile in humanity, as the embodiment of the Germanic Aryan element that he equated with nobility and praised so highly. Thus, no matter to what degree the presence of actual noble blood in his veins could be proven in the contemporary context, by his own estimation at least, his racial capabilities spoke for themselves (Boissel 1993: 29).

⁵⁰⁰ Gobineau would eventually even purchase a small chateau near the town of Oise in Northern France in the sincere belief that it was once the seat of his Norman ancestors. During his diplomatic service in Scandinavia, he would become obsessed with the idea that he was descended from the Viking pirate Ottar Jarl.

In 1835 Gobineau would leave Lorient and head to Paris to find his fortune.⁵⁰¹ Family connections enabled him to enter Legitimist, meaning pro-Bourbon, circles. It was at one of these salons that Gobineau would meet a man who would become one of his closest friends, the historian and political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville. Feeling an intellectual affinity with this young unknown, Tocqueville proposed that the two collaborate on a work examining the influence of the Christian religion on secular morality (Boissel 1993: 90-91). Tocqueville hoped to show that the ideals of the Revolution and Enlightenment, namely citizenship, the nation-state, and the goal of equality, i.e. the liberalism that prevailed in the nineteenth century, were underpinned by the religious principles of charity and a shared human dignity (Herman 1970: 50). Gobineau set to work examining a great range of material in preparation for the project, much of which would form the bedrock of his later racialism.

He read the leading historical, political, and philosophical tracts of his time, among them Savigny, von Humboldt, Hegel, Herder, and Bentham, and looked at ethnographic reports of the customs of non-European peoples. He tried to analyze the evolution of social habits to demonstrate their underlying continuity. The project eventually unravelled, though, owing to Gobineau's frustration at the lack of clarity in the material. As Beasley writes, Gobineau "wanted a pattern, and he wanted it more quickly than Tocqueville's careful research methods would allow" (Beasley 2010: 45). Tocqueville and Gobineau would maintain a correspondence and friendship until the death of the former in 1859. And as we shall see, Tocqueville would be among Gobineau's most insightful critics, clearly envisioning the major contradictions and dangers of the racial theory at its very outset.

Overall Gobineau seems to have been highly disenchanted with life in Paris, viewing the city as a chaotic hodgepodge home to the rabble of all of France and driven by money rather than by the higher ideals that he identified with the aristocratic life (Boissel 1993: 33). Like Rousseau he felt that those around him were his intellectual inferiors and despised the bourgeoisie for their superior wealth and status (Peyre 1970: 35). This perhaps drove him to form in 1840 a short-lived society of young intellectuals committed to aristocratic values that he named *Les Scelti*, meaning the elect or the chosen (Boissel 1993: 83). In 1843 Gobineau quit his

⁵⁰¹ He initially lived with his well-to-do uncle Francois who styled himself a Count, a title that Gobineau would adopt on the man's death in 1855 (Biddiss 1970: 13). He obtained the very modest position of clerk at a gas company all the while continuing to spend his free-time writing romantic fiction published in legitimist journals. These were modeled on the work of Stendhal and set mostly during the *ancien régime* (Rey 1981: 13-15).

job working with the postal service and began to write articles for the legitimist press defending the Bourbons and aristocratic privilege (Beasley 2010: 45). It is interesting to note that at this point, despite his aristocratic pretension, he was fairly liberal in his outlook. His articles praise human rights, argue for the right to work, and call for universal education. Like a post-war conservative Gobineau depicts the right wing, in his case the Legitimist aristocracy, as being a disinterested honest broker capable of leading society to justice and freedom (Biddiss 1970: 19). He envisions the aristocracy as able to do this by casting it as the only group in society capable of serving as a depository for tradition (Buenzod 1967: 216). For this reason Gobineau maintains that the aristocracy represents the authenticity of the nation and holds the best interest of the nation above self-interest, from which flows the equitable distribution of rights and interests for all people regardless of monetary considerations. In these articles Gobineau naturally criticises the centralizing tendency of the French Government as a restriction of aristocratic privilege and advocates for more traditional forms of social organization. But he also argues that political upheaval can only be prevented through the working class being given economic security, and so a stake within society and a disincentive to revolution. At this stage, Gobineau does not envision the political stability of France as being irretrievably lost. What was needed for the young aristocratically minded Gobineau was for society to recapture through elite leadership its commitment to ideals lost during the Revolution of 1789 (Buenzod 1967: 218).

Many of these ideas are encapsulated in an 1843 letter to Tocqueville, in which he writes that reliance on the state makes men personally immoral through forsaking individual acts of charity in favour of collective social responsibility. "I shall no longer be moved by the sight of a beggar and give him some help in passing," Gobineau writes, "I shall, as a modern citizen, help put the government in a position to destroy misery and to restore the social usefulness of the worker who, in his capacity of a human being, must not remain idle" (Gobineau 1959: 200).⁵⁰² Gobineau goes on to complain that the political climate of contemporary France is not sufficiently interested in altruism, self-denial, or the promotion of higher ideals for their own sake generally, but has merely elevated furthering the self-interest of all to a guiding principle under the aegis of the state. As such he argues that modern politics lacks a foundation or grounding in anything above offering material betterment and that this was at the root of

⁵⁰² The accusation that the left wing lacks the personal morality that it advocates socially is, of course, still commonly levelled by conservatives today and was not novel in his own time.

contemporary disorder, in other words, of an all-pervasive selfishness that can only result in chaos. "I said that self-interest seemed to me to be still at the bottom of everything... it is unfortunately at this basic point that the present system is weak. It is evident that the ancient religions found it easy to dignify morality by establishing it under the aegis of divinity. Now it has been brought down to earth" (Gobineau 1959: 203). Overall, it could be said, then, that at this point Gobineau envisioned the social crisis in France as owing more to philosophical and political causes than to biological ones, from the transposition of the "fruits of virtue" from "the individual... (to) all of humanity," and a consequent selfish materialism that undercut the capacity for social harmony (Gobineau 1959: 202).

1848 and the Problem of Group Conflict

Along with so many others of his generation, Gobineau's ideas were radically altered, or were perhaps brought into sharper focus, by the revolutionary upheavals all across Europe in 1848. The events of that fateful year triggered a pervasive feeling throughout the European elite that the old political and social order, which had managed to hold on in relative stability following the Napoleonic Wars, was crumbling and that what was to come in its place was anarchy or despotism grounded on nothing but mob rule. Gobineau was in Paris for the overthrow of Louis-Phillipe in February and afterward during the uprising of the Parisian working class in June. In 1848 he had perceived first hand, so he felt, the true character of the French people, and what he saw overwhelmed him with loathing. He was shocked by the wanton violence and seeming fickleness of the mob. Gobineau sensed the danger of a complete collapse of French society and this awareness engendered a total and unilateral break on his part with that society (Herman 2007: 52). Any romantic notions that he might have entertained about human equality, like many others in both liberal and reactionary circles, was destroyed following the events of 1848, which caused him not simply to doubt whether liberalism had any future—social progress, in other words—but to deny that this was actually possible (Swart 1964: 91). As he would write to Tocqueville retrospectively in 1856 of the June uprising "I have not merely visualized but actually seen the revolution, those dirty shirts disgusted me so much and led me to exaggerate, if you wish, my notions of what is just and what is true" (Gobineau 1959: 299).

Just as Rousseau, then, had claimed that his worldview had been radically altered on the road to Vincennes, when ideas only thought previously in a haphazard and piecemeal fashion had come together in an epiphanous experience, as with Petrarch's on Mount Ventoux or Augustine's in the Garden, so 1848 was Gobineau's own conversion experience which he had come to believe had lead him to the truth of human nature.⁵⁰³ Gobineau would henceforth reject all attempts to improve the well-being of the French people, dismissing them as being "revolutionary," as dangerously upending the order of society, and so as inauthentic and wrong. The people were now at best to be controlled, or ideally ignored, because they were simply not capable of partaking in a shared culture with their betters. As he would write of the "common people" in his novel the *Pleiads*, "What do I make of them?... Look rather and see what they make of themselves... All I perceive, indeed, is a world of insects of different kinds and different sizes... intent on throwing to the ground morals, rights, laws, customs, everything that I respect, everything that I love; a world which sets fire to towns, batters down cathedrals, wants no more books or music or pictures, and substitutes for everything potatoes, beef which is underdone, and wine which is adulterated. Would you spare that crowd if you had within your hands a certain means of destroying it?" (Gobineau 1978: 20).

Gobineau now likewise envisioned the entire contemporary political order, with its progressive ideas of shared citizenship and equality, as deluded by a mediocrity that betrayed its base origins (Boissel 1993: 120). He would label the French establishment as wholly infected by a desire to cater to the mob and so as inevitably headed for disaster. Likewise the French Revolution now became not a misguided attempt to better the lives of the French population, but "something very vile" (Gobineau 1959: 301). Writing in 1877, near the end of his life, Gobineau describes the essence of France's political sensibility as

"a revolutionary instinct. No party has this instinct to a greater extent than any other: they all have it. They are all revolutionary because they all want not to improve, modify or perfect, but to destroy everything and sweep the floor clean. Some say they want to do this in order to put the clock back five, twenty-five or a hundred years; others say they want to create a

⁵⁰³ As Michael Biddiss writes even though the notion of the critical event or juncture may be a cliché or convenient explanatory tool of the historian, for Gobineau the events of 1848 "were indeed just such a turning point" (Biddiss 1970: 59).

completely new society. Whatever the motive or pretext, the instinct is always the same: total destruction" (Political Writings Gobineau 225).

Following the upheaval of 1848, the very idea of society in the sense of cooperation between diverse groups of people and mutual betterment in the name of shared goals and ideals now became wholly foolhardy and anathema in Gobineau's mind (Boissel 1993: 127). He came to see France as a country populated by a fickle scum who would "always maintain an immoderate desire for the intervention of the State in all of its affairs" and who were thus always ready to throw its support behind whatever demagogue could offer them immediate material benefit.⁵⁰⁴

Hannah Arendt extensively discusses in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* how the concept of race, as Gobineau would develop it, like class, emerged in the wake of a loss of confidence in the nation-state and its underpinning in the concept of society as embodied by the events of 1848. The rule of the absolute monarchs that had dominated Europe for centuries was legitimised by a claim to represent the "interests of the nation as a whole, to be the visible exponent and proof of the existence of such a common interest" (Arendt 1958: 230). The revolutions that successfully or unsuccessfully overthrew these monarchies all across Europe were underpinned by the ideal of a citizen in abstraction. They relied on the notion of the *Rights of Man*, guaranteed by common membership in a nation-state serving the common interest in the Jacobin sense. These rights were a necessary protection for a population now shorn of every religious and hereditary distinction and thereby standing as individuals immersed in the body-politic as a social whole (Arendt 1958: 291). Rights that ostensibly stemmed from man's nature, his identity as a man independent of his membership in a national body, were the guarantor of the nation itself, i.e. the reason why it cared for the well-being of its citizens. These rights clearly could not stem from control over or participation in the nation, i.e. from historical factors outside the exercise of popular sovereignty, otherwise they would be groundless and without legitimacy because they would not be universally valid. Yet in the chaos of the social upheaval of the French Revolution and the others that followed in its wake, the *Rights of Man* were revealed to be at the mercy of groups that operated below the national level, i.e. at the societal

⁵⁰⁴ "Passively obedient to the gendarmerie, to the tax collector, to the surveyor, to the engineer, a people... to which absolute and irrevocable centralization is the last word, such a people will not only never have free institutions but will not even understand what they are" (Gobineau 1959: 302).

level. The *Rights of Man* could be usurped by groups in their social conflicts with other groups, and the nation state's guarantee of these rights was revealed to be no guarantee at all. In practice, then, the *Rights of Man* could only be used by some in society as a weapon against others. Moreover, these struggles were blatantly motivated by the interests of groups operating within society with no intention, since there was now no basis of legitimacy above the ability to control the government of the nation itself, beyond that of simply furthering their own material advantage by identifying the interests of their particular group with the well-being of the body politic as a whole. These groups also inevitably seemed to be in a constant state of war with one another by virtue of their need to control the state since claiming to act in the best interest of the nation as a whole was the *raison d'etre* of their grabs for power.⁵⁰⁵

Consequently, human rights were subject to the arbitrariness against which they were supposed to contend in light of the fact that politics could not be divorced from historical circumstances that seemed to get in the way of their universality. In the same way, the promise of equality that vitally underpinned the nation state—something that Rousseau took great pains to argue for—was revealed in its failings to be nothing but a chimera, to be without actual existence. This is because social conflict demonstrated to all that the promise of equality by virtue of common birth in a political community was meaningless outside power and influence. In other words, conflict showed that in reality no one was, had ever been, or would ever be equal because individuals only had dignity and protection to the extent that they had the ability to exercise an influence on the nation state that guaranteed this equality. And this exposed the inevitability of power differentials within the nation that had only been latent when the *Rights of Man* was drafted, when rights "were regarded as being independent of history and the privileges which history had accorded certain strata of society" (Arendt 1958: 298). All this demonstrated that individuals could not stand outside history in the interests of equality, as equals, because their very membership in society, and existence as individuals as such, was dependent on circumstances that were shown to make them unequal. And in this way it also became apparent that historical factors—viewed as surmountable in establishing the ideal political community by the optimists of the Enlightenment, amongst whom Rousseau was front and center—were all

⁵⁰⁵ As Arendt suggests, the realization that rights were dependent on the degree to which one was able to influence the nation-state showed that the political system was in reality underpinned—as Gobineau himself had realized—by nothing except self-interest, and that for this reason "common interest was in constant danger of being replaced by a permanent conflict among class interests and struggle for control of the state machinery, that is, by a permanent civil war" (Arendt 1958: 230).

important in the actual operation of that political community. Historical factors took precedence over an individual's ability to influence their own life, and what is akin to this of social influence, the role that living with and sympathizing with one's contemporaries exercises on judgement, was thereby supplanted by inescapable loyalties to transhistorical groupings within the nation itself. Citizens were shown then not to be individuals ruled over by the state, as liberalism posited, but first and foremost members of an inescapable social order that transcended individuality because it was historical. And thus, their positionality in that order was also revealed to be independent of their will or desire as citizens.

These groupings, moreover, in a way that Rousseau could never have envisioned, could only be shown to have an identity or purpose, by definition, when they cast themselves against other groupings. Individuals could only be workers, bourgeoisie, or members of the aristocracy, when they were not something else, by opposing the interests of others in the community. And thus group membership was synonymous with social exclusion and conflict. The common interest and the exercise of sovereignty that justified it, which many in the Enlightenment had believed was discoverable through democratic processes, emerged in the wake of the chaos that followed the French Revolution and its many imitators as something quite arbitrary in practice. It was constantly, and seemingly inevitably, at risk of being hijacked by interests that operated at the sub-national level, and as a result of these habitual crises, it was revealed that the nation-state was something other than what it had been imagined to be. Human rights and the promise of equality within the state were exposed, then, as ephemera lacking substance. The national community likewise, as Gobineau had realized, as both the supreme guarantor and arbiter of the rights of the citizen, now appeared as merely hypothetical. The nation lost its "rational character." As a placeholder it could be anything and used to justify any particular view even at the risk of falling victim to a "lawless arbitrariness" (Arendt 1958: 231).

In the wake of his first-hand experience of revolution Gobineau's perspective on French society would change to reflect all the views discussed above. Henceforth he would characterize the democratic dream of equality that Rousseau had cast as the basis of the true political community and of an authentic subjectivity as an impossibility. Gobineau would correctly perceive that what he depicts as the "chimera" of equality was in his time "the most admired, advocated and fundamental bases of modern French society; it is neither more nor less than the clearest and best defined of the so-called principles of 1789. The entire eighteenth century was

proud to prepare its coming" (Gobineau 1970 211). But for Gobineau, in contrast to this egalitarian ambition, everything in history and everyday reality suggested that men were inherently unequal with the result that those who based their political conclusions on this were "under a great illusion" (Gobineau 1999: 97). Consequently, in his mind, the promise of equality would only serve to reduce men to the lowest common denominator.⁵⁰⁶ And the inevitable result of this was inflamed ambition and a corresponding lack of fulfillment, a sense of disappointment on the part of the disenfranchised that could only end in outrage and civil strife. For Gobineau, as he puts it, while "the friends of equality... talk very loudly... about 'the power of customs and institutions'... about how powerfully the health and growth of a nation are influenced by 'the essential quality of a government, taken by itself,' or 'the fact of despotism or liberty'... (it is) just at this point that I too shall oppose their arguments" (Gobineau 1999: 39). Those who championed equality had everything backwards, claimed Gobineau, because they refused "quite wrongly, to admit that certain qualities are by a fatal necessity the exclusive inheritance of such and such a stock" (Gobineau 1999: 37). And this made them blind to the fact that the political structure of a nation had no effect on the character of the people themselves but that this structure reflected its people, namely its racial composition.

Like Marx, Gobineau would come to see the nation as a mere sham, as a smokescreen for hiding fundamental conflicts. The state became something inevitably at the service of only segments of the population. Patriotism to him would henceforth come to appear as nothing more than an elaborate farce, and his loyalty to France, as we shall see, as a lifelong diplomat in its service, would be merely provisional, for the single purpose of receiving a paycheck. He would come to see himself first as an aristocrat and as a member of a global elite and only incidentally as a Frenchman.⁵⁰⁷ The great majority of his countrymen now appeared to him only as "an abyss over which civilization is suspended... (resembling) the deep stagnant waters, sleeping at the bottom of the gulf" (Gobineau 1999: 101). Subsequently, following 1848, Gobineau came to

⁵⁰⁶ "To the state of completely stupefied passivity to which humanity, stuffed with potatoes and cheap meat, would of necessity find itself reduced if such startling innovations were to be realized" (Gobineau 1970: 213-214).

⁵⁰⁷ Gobineau would even estimate that, at the most, only 10 million of the 36 million people living in France in the middle of the nineteenth century could be classed as individuals capable of partaking in European civilization (Gobineau 1999: 100).

detest the liberalism that predominated in his own time and proudly depicted himself as a lone wolf standing out against modern day deceptions.⁵⁰⁸

Even the very concept of the nation in Gobineau's mind would come to mean something very different from what the majority of his contemporaries took it to be. This is reflected in the very different sense of the terminology that Gobineau uses in his work when compared to those that prevailed during the Enlightenment and into his own day. The word nation is not used by him in a way synonymous with the word "society," in the sense of a group of people united through shared customs and ideas, as Rousseau depicted it, but rather refers to a "civilization," the battleground of groups in perennial conflict. Likewise for him, the word "society" applied only to distinct groups operating within larger social formations.⁵⁰⁹ To be capable of grappling with his own behaviour, then, man's actions would have to be entirely bound to the influence of something that took place within man himself, but over which paradoxically man, in the form of the social, could exercise no control because it was rooted in something that constituted society itself, i.e. in nature. And thus, as Jacques Barzun phrases it, the notion of "the Man-Machine and the Race-Group" could get started (Barzun 1981: 21).

Race before Racism

While prior to 1848 Gobineau felt as if he were simply a cut above the common Frenchmen, he now felt completely alienated from them and wanted to know why. Gobineau sought to understand the basis of his own perceived superiority and came to the conclusion that while the great majority of the French had simply degenerated into the unwashed masses on the barricades, that he, by virtue of his aristocratic lineage, had retained a sense of decency and humanity. He now identified himself and the man of his caste as possessing, as he writes, a "singular value, by virtue of which he is naturally raised above the level of the common people...

⁵⁰⁸ As he would write to Tocqueville of his race theory, "What is my Essai sur les races if not proof that I am not afraid and that I do not accept the commonplaces and the ideas so dearly held by our century?" (Gobineau 1959: 298).

⁵⁰⁹ As he writes, by a 'society' "I do not mean the more or less extended sphere within which, in some form or other, a distinct sovereignty is exercised... What I mean by a 'society' is an assemblage of men moved by similar ideas and the same instincts; their political unity may be more or less imperfect, but their social unity must be complete. Thus Egypt, Assyria, Greece, India, and China were, or still are, the theatre where distinct and separate societies have played out their own destinies, save when these have been brought for a time into conjunction by political troubles" (Gobineau 1999: 7).

My tastes are not the tastes of fashion. My feelings are my own, my loves and hatreds are not dictated by what I read in the newspapers. Independence of mind, the most unrestrained freedom of thought, are the inalienable privileges of my noble origin. Heaven granted them to me in my cradle" (Gobineau 1978: 16). He came to see himself, in other words, as literally not like his fellow man, in the physical sense. He had looked into the abyss, seen the spectre that was haunting Europe, and came away a changed man.

Biddiss, following French scholarship,⁵¹⁰ has pointed out that the germ of Gobineau's turn to racialism can be detected in his unfinished epic poem entitled *Manfreidne* (Biddiss 1970: 65).⁵¹¹ The poem is significant because in it Gobineau brings forward, for the first time, the notion of a glorified aristocratic Aryan master race, in the form of Manfredine, and because the course of its events are described in racial terms (André 1990: 22-23). As Gobineau would write on the poem's title page, "Conceived in 1838. Begun in the spring of 1842... Taken up again in 1844 after quite a long interruption. Finished in its first draft in 1845, but not corrected. Resumed in 1848, under the influence of events and realized then in a manner that was broader, clearer and more absolute in its convictions. Until that time I did not know what I wanted" (cited in Biddiss 1970: 64).

Race as a means of explaining the internal divisions within society actually had a long and idiosyncratic history in Gobineau's France. The notion that French society was divided between the descendants of Germanic conquerors, who constituted the country's aristocracy, and the original Gallo-Romans inhabitants, who after the conquest came to make up the lower and middle classes, originated in the writings of the late seventeenth century Count Henri de Boulainvilliers (Barzun 1960 139-140). Barzun demonstrated in *The French Race* that the original conception of Germanic superiority as developed by Boulainvilliers was an attempt on the part of the nobility to fight back against the centralizing efforts of the regime of Louis XIV (Barzun 1960: 146-147). Boulainvilliers harkened back to Tacitus' *Germania* in an attempt to establish that political freedom was the heritage of the aristocracy alone and that absolute monarchy was a form of government to which the nobility, by right of conquest, should not be

⁵¹⁰ For Buenzod's extensive discussion of this see: (Buenzod 1967: 278-301).

⁵¹¹ In this work Gobineau recounts the actions of a fictional female aristocrat in Naples, descended from its one time Norman rulers, during the uprising of Masaniello in 1647. Countess Manfredine orchestrates a rebellion against the city's Spanish overlords with the intention of freeing her brother, Roger, who has been taken into their custody. She has no sympathies with the common people, even hating them, and merely uses them as a tool to free her brother. Her revolution is finally subverted by the racially heterogeneous fisherman Masaniello who briefly becomes a demagogue to the rabble before being himself undone (Herman 2007: 52).

subject as it was derived from the political structure that predominated in the vanquished Roman Empire. Boulainvilliers also argued that the turmoil and social degeneration that he detected in the French society of his day was a direct result of the inferiority of the Roman form of administration in comparison to the Frankish, as could be seen for instance in the genius of Charlemagne (Peyre 1968: 29). As Arendt writes, Boulainvilliers' purpose was to claim for the nobility "an original and therefore eternal distinction" by denying a common origin with the rest of the French people and so a contiguous, and therefore superior, identity (Arendt 1958: 162). And in this light it is interesting to note, as we shall return to, that the origins of modern day racism, at least in the European context, can be seen to reside in attempts to explain social animosity within an overwhelmingly White country. And indeed the idea that races of people can be defined as sharing personal characteristics is so counterintuitive to the experience of life in a racially homogeneous society—the social being by definition the different—that it is hard to account for the emergence of this bizarre idea in any other way.

Boulainvilliers' theory grew in popularity among the aristocracy as its power continued to wane under Louis XIV's successors. The nobles clung to the idea that the new centralizing forces active in French society were the actions of interlopers and that the ascendant bourgeoisie were mere squatters. His ideas about the Franks would continue into the eighteenth century, echoed by Montesquieu's germanist position in the *Spirit of the Laws* and Mably's *Observations on the History of France* (Peyre 1968: 30). And Gobineau's familiarity with these arguments can be detected both in his discussion of France in the *Essay* and in an 1856 letter to Tocqueville, which, while criticizing the idea of "public utility," i.e. expropriation in the name of the state, argues that every one of the "free institutions" of France was destroyed by royal power in the sixteenth century (Gobineau 1959: 300). But, one must realize that the whole conception of superiority in Boulainvilliers' theory was underpinned by the idea that the Franks and Gallo-Romans had remained unmixed to the present time (Barzun 1960: 142). In other words, and as will be in direct opposition to Gobineau's principal idea, for Boulainvilliers it was not racial admixture but racial difference—the actions of nations, as Rousseau would have understood them—that is the key to understanding history. In Arendt's words, the superiority of a human group in this conception of race remained tied to a "historical deed" rather than to some incontrovertible "physical fact" (Arendt 1958: 163). Prior to the nineteenth century, in other words, the concepts of race and people were indistinguishable.

The first step toward the idea of race as we know it was taken in the first half of the nineteenth century when the influential French naturalist Georges Cuvier in the *Animal Kingdom* proposed the following threefold division of the human race on the basis of skin colour: White, Black, and Yellow.⁵¹² Yet for Cuvier, as for most others, the pre-eminence given to the story of Genesis in the Bible seemed to irrefutably point to a single origin, and therefore a shared lineage, for all men, irrespective of any outward distinction. This undercut any notion that the races were biologically distinct entities and favoured more naturalistic and hence malleable explanations about human difference. During the Enlightenment and in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was climactic influence that was primarily regarded as the all-important conditioning factor of human biology. The Comte de Buffon argued in his *Natural History* that "savages" transported to Europe and fed on European foods would gradually adopt European customs and even themselves become White (Augstein 1996: XV). Buffon did maintain that the "natural" colouring of all mankind was White and that Adam and Eve were Caucasian, but for him the races were still not themselves distinct; how could they be when they could clearly interbreed, have religious ideas, and alike possess some sort of culture? This position was lent credence by the observation that continuous procreation between different human groups throughout history had not eradicated the visible indicators of racial separation.⁵¹³

Monogenetic theories of humanity, such as those discussed above, first came under challenge in the nineteenth century in Great Britain where Boulainvilliers' ideas about the importance of ethnicity had proved popular and taken root among some of that country's leading thinkers, men like Thomas Carlyle (Barzun 1965: 19). Justifications of imperialism and critiques of the abolitionist movement became intertwined with "scientific" attempts to demonstrate that the human races were distinct species with distinct origins—polygenetic—and from this that the differences between human groups could be attributed to racial characteristics. As was the case in France, the supremacy of the White race—its distinct character—relied on the idea that it was incapable of mixing with its inferiors to any lasting degree, that its vitality was in other words a constant of history. The arguments on the part of Buffon and the others in favour

⁵¹² He was preceded by Hans Blumenbach who, in the 1770s, on the basis of skull shape, had divided the human race into five types.

⁵¹³ Tocqueville himself attempted to refute Gobineau's racial theory in this way in 1852 when he reminded him that the leading naturalists had come to the conclusion that "a mixture of species would, in time, have produced common offspring which would sooner or later have replaced their original progenitors... Mankind thus belongs to a singular species and, according to Buffon and Flourens, human variations are products of three secondary and external causes: of climate, of food, and of the manner of life" (Tocqueville 1959: 222).

of monogenesis and climatic influence as the basis of racial distinction were then reversed by the White supremacists, who argued that the mere existence of distinct races indicated that they were different and could not mix. The Scottish biologist Robert Knox, for instance, who in his *Races of Men* put forward a racial theory of history similar in many respects to Gobineau's, argued that a group of truly interracial people would prove infertile and die out (Davies 1988: 74). At most the mixing of races could produce hybrids, in an analogous way to how a donkey and a horse produce a mule, whose fertility would decline with each successive generation until becoming extinguished. Knox, like the English phrenologist W.F. Edwards, supported this theory by claiming that the racial history of the colonization of Spanish America indicated that racial mixture was not permanently possible. He argued that members of one race could not interbreed with another to any significant degree because over time the numerically dominant race would wholly absorb whatever element of the lesser race remained (Augstein 1996: XXVII-XXXI). Thus, when Gobineau turned to the subject to explain the revolutions of 1848, the races were viewed by both the proponents of polygenesis and monogenesis alike as "so separate and dissimilar that they usually could not mix with or otherwise change one another. Individuals might mix, but races could not mix to any significant degree... 'race' was too persistent to undergo change" (Beasley 2010: 49).

The Birth of Modern Racialism

Ironically it was the Revolution of 1848 that would ultimately give Gobineau the leisure and opportunity to develop and refine his ideas. In the summer of 1849, following the election of the soon-to-be Emperor Napoleon III, Tocqueville was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. Tocqueville would hold this position for only five months, but he asked Gobineau, then only 33, to become his official secretary (Boissel 1993: 121). Like Tocqueville, Gobineau by no means supported Bonaparte, but could not pass up the opportunity and so began a distinguished diplomatic career that would last until his forced retirement from the service in 1877. After Tocqueville's exit from the ministry, Gobineau would move on to become the first secretary of the Berne legation. With the exception of a brief tenure as the *charge d'affaires* to the Kingdom of Hanover in 1851, whose aristocratic regime he greatly admired, Gobineau would serve in Berne until the beginning of 1854 all the while detesting his first-hand experience of the Swiss

democracy that Rousseau had idolized (Davies 1988: 59). Diplomatic life in Switzerland was professionally undemanding and thus provided Gobineau with ample free time to develop what would become his all-encompassing philosophy of history and explanation of contemporary social problems.

Gobineau's race theory would draw on a wide range of scholarship. As a man of culture Gobineau was no doubt also aware of the inquiry called by the *Société Ethnologique* in 1847 into the differences between the races. Above all he would be influenced by contemporaneous developments in linguistics and philology that in Gobineau's mind, as in many others, would justify the idea that the entirety of human civilization owed to the primordial actions of one group. As is well known, at the end of the eighteenth century the British jurist Sir William Jones discovered that, as they are labelled today, the Indo-European languages all share certain grammatical similarities that point to their having a single point of origin (Augstein 1996: XXI). Jones fatefully connected this hypothetical tongue to the mythic Aryan invasions of the South of the subcontinent from Northern India as described in ancient Sanskrit literature. In Sanskrit the word *arya* is synonymous with nobility and in the ancient texts the Aryans were described as tall and fair (Barzun 1965: 97). There was nothing to necessitate that a single language would correspond to the actions of single human group yet such an inference was popular in the context of the time (Snyder 1966: 40). It was assumed that these Aryans diffused themselves throughout the world, bringing language and civilization wherever they went. And to the Europeans who looked into the matter, the military and economic pre-eminence of their own nations in the nineteenth century, when combined with their physical resemblance to the Aryans, as described in the myth, clearly pointed to their own descent from this race of superhuman conquerors (Barzun 1965: 98). The German romantic movement, which as we saw Gobineau was exposed to in his youth and tried to emulate in his writings, in particular equated themselves with the Aryans. In so doing they drew a link between themselves and what they perceived as the greatness of the Middle Ages, which they attributed to the dominance of German culture, and also to the monarchs of German descent who led most of the royal families of Europe (Davies 1988: 23).

Gobineau, drawing on the interpretations of Sanskrit source material found in Christian Lassen's *Indische Alterthumskunde*, would take this emphasis on the pre-eminence of the ancient Aryans to a new and more all encompassing level (Figueira 2012: 70). Taking for granted that

contemporary European geopolitical dominance signalled innate superiority, Gobineau adopted Cuzier's threefold distinction between the White, Yellow, and Black races, with the Whitest of the White, the blond haired and blue eyed Scandinavian, becoming for Gobineau the embodiment of the "Aryan." For Gobineau superiority was akin to activity, the White race in his mind had clearly been more active in history therefore its members were superior to the other human varieties. As he writes in an important passage,

"'All men are brothers.' This is the political axiom. Would you like to hear it in its scientific form? 'All men,' say the defenders of human equality, 'are furnished with similar intellectual powers, of the same nature, of the same value, of the same compass'... So the brain of the Huron Indian contains in undeveloped form an intellect which is absolutely the same as that of the Englishman or the Frenchman! Why then, in the course of the ages, has he not invented printing or steam power? I should be quite justified in asking our Huron why, if he is equal to our European peoples, his tribe has never produced a Caesar or a Charlemagne among its warriors, and why his bards and sorcerers have, in some inexplicable way, neglected to become Homers and Galens" (Gobineau 1999: 37).

But once again Gobineau developed his racial theory owing to his fears about the extermination of his own class rather than to encourage the extermination of other "breeds" of men. As Biddiss points out at this stage in his life, the early 1850s, Gobineau did not possess "any significant intimate experience of inter-racial relationships" (Biddiss 1970: 267). As we shall see his theory was not an attempt to justify European colonialism or White supremacy in any way (Buenzod 1993: 477).⁵¹⁴ Instead it was aimed first and foremost at the White men around him who he considered to be his inferiors.⁵¹⁵

Prior to Gobineau, race was a factor to be considered among many; race reflected climate and helped to explain the structure of society. Gobineau's theory transformed all this to make the

⁵¹⁴ For a common misreading of Gobineau's views on imperialism see: (Audinet 2004: 118)

⁵¹⁵ "Gobineau's work was the product of the decaying aristocracy, threatened by the new urbanism and egalitarianism of the industrial age. Indeed, it was a monumental preachment against democracy, a perfectly vivid defence of aristocracy and feudalism, an expansion of the vanity of a proud-spirited poet into a 'scientific' interpretation of all civilizations as the creation of a fictitious race of which he imagined himself... to be a member. He fancied that the times in which he lived were decadent, and heralded the decline of civilization. Consequently, Gobineau sought to identify whatever general principles might govern such decline with the social forces he observed with contempt around him" (Tzevetan 1993: 65)

biological nature of man alone, irrespective of any other factor, the explanation for society and every kind of human action (Barzun 1965: 52; Buenzod 1967: 421). In this way the identification of race with culture was taken by Gobineau to extremes not contemplated by the men of his time. He made the two synonymous by rooting his theory in something that was undeniable—the physical nature of man—and so capable of serving as the foundation of a totally deterministic theory, yet sufficiently malleable to serve as a plausible cause of every sort of variation in human behaviour, thereby enabling it to become the true driver of history.⁵¹⁶ This driver would simply be the mixture of human groups—or race mixture, in Gobineau's terms—the combination of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds within a single community characteristic of practically every polity in history (Barzun 1965: 54). It was only in this way that race could really be taken to the "next level" as an ideology of total explanation in a way that was not possible when the races were viewed as merely fixed. In Gobineau's theory races would cease to be static physiological elements and instead would become protean sorts of essences within the individual himself. And the mixing of races, now seen as responsible for every human event, would also be capable of accounting for the perceived degeneration of society, which weighed on Gobineau so heavily (Buenzod 1967: 484-485).

Gobineau would develop this theory as a response to the social conditions prevailing in mid-nineteenth century France. These, specifically violent internal division and social strife within the nation-state, were a direct result of the breakdown of the worldview that Rousseau and his successors had championed. Rousseau's social ideal was of a man at one with his fellows by virtue of shared interest and culture. Like Emile, the ideal citizen was entirely malleable; he had no content without social influence, and as such could be molded just as the state desired. Through the promotion of human rights, democracy, and, above all, equality, the dream of liberalism promised to expunge the sins of the past in a new and better future for all. Nations were historical but were above history in the sense that they could will social progress through progressive legislation and the rule of law. 1848 demonstrated that the pre-eminence that Rousseau had attached to the optimal social formation as a means of remedying the problems

⁵¹⁶ "The tenor of ethnological thought in France as Gobineau turned to the subject of race was this: Races were so separate and dissimilar that they usually could not mix with or otherwise change one another. Individuals might mix, but races could not mix to any significant degree. In the many conquests of one 'race' by another in European history, 'race' was too persistent to undergo change. There were never enough people among the conquerors to make much of a difference. Gobineau argued the opposite. He believed very strongly that races were mixed. The fact was central to his theory: Aryans mixed their blood with others to create civilizations" (Beasley 2010: 49).

that he identified in the Enlightenment society of his own day was unable to account for the continuing influence of groups within society and so their inability to get along with one another. And the subject that would reflect this problematic was the asocial, alienated man unable to live harmoniously with his fellows because of the influence of something above or more fundamental than society, the influence of inescapable historical factors aligned to nature. These were, in Gobineau's case, racial factors that worked upon man behind his back, as it were, irrespective of his actual dealings with his contemporaries and regardless of his feelings of comity or amity for them.

Gobineau admits in the preface to his *Essay* that he had initially entertained progressive ideas about human equality. "This was the hope I myself cherished for a brief moment... had I not been suddenly struck with the devastating thought, that in my hurry I was putting forward something that was absolutely without proof" (Gobineau 1999: XII). Under the guise of presenting scientific claims arrived at through careful "inductive" research, the depth of knowledge demonstrated in his theory is nonetheless indeed profound, Gobineau writes that facts gradually led him to recognize the "colossal truth" that "the racial question over-shadows all other problems of history," that, in his words, "the inequality of the races from whose fusion a people is formed is enough to explain the whole course of its destiny" (Gobineau 1999: XII). As is clear from that remark Gobineau fundamentally believed that he had arrived at an answer to what he perceived to be human degradation.⁵¹⁷ He wanted, and presupposed it possible, "to find a simple principle to bring order to his studies" (Beasley 2010: 45). He believed that it lay within the power of man himself to discover the solution to otherness because, by implication, man had caused his own problems through some failure to recognize what he himself was. For Gobineau, referring to the cellular theory of the French biologist Marie Bichat, "the key to the riddle," in a way that Augustine would have appreciated, "lay within" man himself, in this case his biology, because this was "the only road that really led to discoveries" (Gobineau 1999: 24). Like another figure that would seek to solve the "riddle of history" Gobineau would respond to the problem of man within the group, emerging from the failures of the sort of political communities that Rousseau championed, with a group man. As Gobineau writes in the *Essay*, arguing that any true, "scientific," understanding must rise beyond the "ridiculous" contemporary

⁵¹⁷ As Spring writes, in all his writings Gobineau is an author in search of a "permanent principle," a universal explanation for human behaviour (Spring 1995: 242).

focus on the rights and potentialities of a single human being, "I will not discuss... individuals taken one by one" (Gobineau 1999: 179). Rather than try and ameliorate it, then, Gobineau would put forward a position that actually accepted social strife, the lack of harmony and the problem of infighting within the political community, as the centrepiece of his own theory. Gobineau, like the other figures examined in this work, accepted the contemporary problem of man in society and so its subject, because otherwise how could he have responded to it, but would cast them in a new racialized form.⁵¹⁸

And in this way, in its form even if not in the content of his solutions, Gobineau may perhaps resemble someone who appears to be his polar opposite. The "mature Marx," the problem solving Marx as opposed to the speculative "young Marx" of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, was a man in search of a means of explaining and solving contemporary problems.⁵¹⁹ Both thinkers believed that man, admittedly only the Aryan for Gobineau, was born for a better life, for a sort of problem-free or optimal state of existence, and wanted to examine why contemporary European civilization had failed to grasp this possibility. Marx, like Gobineau, was obsessed with alienation, that man is beholden to factors that dominate him and that exist beyond human control, and from this that he is seemingly blind to his own nature; that he cannot simply will progress. In the nineteenth century the failure of the social meant that group conflict seemed to embody this alienation. Society seemed driven by conflicts that were inherent to it and could not be resolved, and thus existed before society and irrespective of the state's best efforts to alleviate them. Rousseau too had been concerned with alienation—how and why men are ruled by their own inventions. But for him salvation was an omnipresent possibility. The deceptions of society could simply be realized and dispensed with by an act of will, by virtue of a free choice or proper upbringing, through correctly orienting oneself to the community and to the order of reality. In this respect, Rousseau's social theory

⁵¹⁸ "Race takes on a significance for Gobineau because... he identifies it as the determining motor of history. This allows him to provide an antithetical argument to the liberal sentiments of Rousseau's answer in the Second Discourse to the question of 'What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law?' From the perspective of history, Gobineau's nature tells a different story to Rousseau's. History, he claims, in fact exists only through the activities of the white race" (Young 1995: 93).

⁵¹⁹ As Barzun writes of Marx in a way equally true of Gobineau "Classes, races, political groups, lived in his imagination as entities stuffed with people but not composed of them. He would have liked to move them en masse, like huge pawns. And contrawise, individuals took on in his eyes the massive importance of whole groups" (Barzun 1981: 182).

opened the way for historicism but was not itself historicist. For Marx and Gobineau, the shackles of alienation were something entirely different.⁵²⁰

The problem of man as dominated by a group association independent of the social, living with others in a shared political community, necessitated that these thinkers ground man in a natural characteristic. This is because if the individual's experience of society could no longer be taken to have a formative influence on the constitution of groups, then one had to look beyond the individual's own experience in order to determine the cause of social conflict. The social chaos of the nineteenth century, as amply illustrating that societies were not homogenous entities, would necessitate the positing of transnational explanations above the level of what was crisis ridden, explanations not grounded in the effect of society—living together in terms of shared creations—but in something natural, i.e. above and so formative of the social. As we examined, as soon as the nation-state was constituted, its contradictions emerged for all to see in group conflict (Arendt 1958: 161). Only a cause of this sort could serve to explain the actions of an individual whose interests seemed attached to factors that existed beyond the national or social interest. If, as was evident in its failures, society clearly did not have the effect on people that it was believed to have by Rousseau—a constituting effect on the mindset of the individual by virtue of living together in a political community—if people could not choose, or perhaps be made, to change who they were simply as a result of living with others, then one had to look for answers beyond the level of society. This natural characteristic could then serve as the basis for the division of groups within society, the second nature of their customs and ideas.

Gobineau thus perhaps like Marx, needed to look to something that formed society itself—group conflict—since social influence, the exercise of choice or will by the individual as resulting from simply co-existing with others, could seemingly not account for the problems that confronted their contemporaries. If the "second nature" of society could not account for the constitution of groups and their conflicts, if group divisions seemed inherent, then one could not turn anywhere else in search of a solution but to some natural factor itself. They were in search of something that could determine man's actions by virtue of his physical rather than social nature. And in his efforts to link man to some transcendental, in the sense of before human

⁵²⁰ Comparisons between Marx and Gobineau and between race and class have been drawn in terms of their pretensions to be a natural science (Herman 2007: 63-64); desire to combat idealism and romanticism (Barzun 1981: XXI); and common response to the pervasive sense of alienation that accompanied the industrial revolution (Arendt 1958: 225).

activity, neither the individual nor society, in a very real sense, could exist for Gobineau, at least not in the way that Rousseau had perceived them, since the social served merely as a reflection of something that was more fundamental, perhaps transcendental. Since human action, in the form of social or cultural activity, could also not affect the operation of these respective transcendentals, history had to become, for Gobineau, synonymous with the actual operation of these transcendentals in time, the history of this material principle. History, in the sense of what has come before the individual, is completely the basis of what comes after. And it is for this reason, because of their naturalism, that history is inescapable. For Gobineau, then, utopia would not be an omnipresent possibility, as it had been for Rousseau, for whom man remained in control of what was happening to him via his ideas, but was something dependent on history since the result of the actions of group membership determined the behaviour of the individual before the influence of the social (Barzun 1981: 332). And this focus on man would enable the replacement of Rousseau's emphasis on an achieved characteristic, the social, with one that was wholly ascribed, race, in the sense that man is born into association with an aspect of nature that determines him and thus has no ability to influence its future course.

The Essay

As Marx had *Das Kapital* so Gobineau had the *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, a hugely ambitious work that sought to lay out a comprehensive history of practically the entirety of human civilization.⁵²¹ Gobineau begins the Essay by posing his main question, which as we have seen reflects his principal preoccupation in the context of his native France, of why societies decline and fall, why history seems to suggest that the greatness of every civilization, even those possessing at times every advantage and near absolute power, is inevitably only temporary. As he writes the fall of civilizations "is the most striking, and, at the same time, the most obscure, of all the phenomena of history. It is a calamity that strikes fear into the soul, and yet has always something so mysterious and so vast in reserve, that the thinker is never weary of looking at it, of studying it, of groping for its secrets" (Gobineau 1999: 1).

⁵²¹ It was published in two stages, the first two volumes were issued in 1853 while the last two, including the all important conclusion, came out in 1854 (Biddiss 1970: 92). The first of its four volumes is an overview of Gobineau's racial theory while the last three are a survey of the history of ten world civilizations. Only the first volume of the Essay has been translated into English, and as a result I have translated the passages of relevance to this work from the subsequent volumes.

Gobineau proceeds to systematically examine and reject, perhaps in a similar fashion to Rousseau's critique of cultural refinement in his First Discourse, all existing explanations for social degeneration. As we shall see he is obsessed by the idea that every activity that we would consider worthwhile and human, i.e. the product of communal life, is tinged with an inevitable tendency toward its opposite, decline and decay. In Gobineau's words, "the instability of mortal things apply with the same rigour to civilizations as to peoples, to peoples as to States, to States as to individuals; and we are forced to affirm that every assemblage of men, however ingenious the network of social relations that protect it, acquires on the very day of its birth, hidden among the elements of its life, the seeds of an inevitable death" (Gobineau 1999: 2). In other words, Gobineau will address in his Essay, just as the other figures did, the problem of the otherness that seems to overshadow human action, and through this, find, if not its remedy, at least its point of origin and so a knowledge of what drives man's behaviour. He begins the Essay by critiquing the idea that fanaticism, immorality, and luxury are responsible for the decay of a nation. These factors, Gobineau insists, often come to the "surface in the death-agony of a people" but are not themselves the cause of catastrophe (Gobineau 1999: 6). He writes that the peak of the power and prestige of the cities of the Italian Renaissance coincided with their period of maximal luxury (Gobineau 1999: 8). Similarly, he asserts that the Romans of the Early Republic, who "treated their wives like slaves, their children like cattle," were in all likelihood no less virtuous or honest than those of the later Empire and that, in any case, however burdened "with depravity, the nations seem to march on very comfortably, and often, in fact, to owe their greatness to their detestable customs" (Gobineau 1999: 9). Misgovernment too, or poor political institutions, something that he claims is often most prevalent at the birth of nations, typically coincide with periods in which a people is most vigorous (Gobineau 1999: 19).

Religion also plays no part in the success of a people. Even Christianity itself, in contrast to what many of his contemporaries claimed, is in no way capable of improving a people because "its kingdom, we may say, is in the most literal sense 'not of this world'" (Gobineau 1999: 70). Christianity, he argues, appeals to the spirit, the soul, which even the basest of humans share. For this reason, it rejects no one, but is also incapable of affecting the material facts of life, the nature of a people.⁵²² The achievement of Constantine, fulfilling the dream of

⁵²² He writes, for example, that it would astound him if the Cherokees, who were almost wholly converted by Methodist missionaries to Christianity, "ever managed to form one of the States of the American Union, or exert any

many Emperors before him in moving the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome itself, Gobineau also claims, demonstrated how ill suited the location of Rome was for a city that would rule the world (Gobineau 1999: 61). A nation then "does not derive its value from its position; it never has and never will" (Gobineau 1999: 61).⁵²³ In sum, like Rousseau's critique of original sin, Gobineau argues that all causes of decline hitherto taken as fact rely on circular arguments: "a people dies of its endemic diseases because it is degenerate, and it degenerates because it dies" (Gobineau 1999: 24). As he writes in the foreword to the Essay's Second Edition, "the prosperity or misfortunes, the greatness or decadence of a nation had for a long time been attributed to vices or virtues... People thought that these keys had opened the doors of every mystery; but in fact all remained hidden" (Gobineau 1970: 229-230).

The whole method and tone of his argument here—eliminating one cause after another formerly taken to be responsible for social degeneration—presupposes that there is in fact a single cause of decline, overlooked up to now, that he intends to deductively reveal. Gobineau's argument implicitly relies on the notion that the fact that each cause of decline cannot be shown to apply universally renders it a false explanation. He sets the standard of truth, therefore, as something that can be shown to apply in all cases. "It is being dimly seen that one ought not to have given such a preponderant importance to evils which were after all merely derivative, and that the true causes of the life and death of peoples should have been sought elsewhere, and had been drawn from a deeper well" (Gobineau 1999: 23). In place of all external factors, Gobineau takes degeneration to mean that a group of people no longer has the same "intrinsic value" as its forbearers. The "man of a decadent time, the degenerate man properly so called, is a different being, from the racial point of view, from the heroes of the great ages" (Gobineau 1999: 25). Degeneration, then, in its simplest terms means that a people is no longer what it once was. Gobineau interprets this in a biological sense in that it literally no longer has "the same blood in its veins" (Gobineau 1999: 25) and as such, its civilization is "no longer in the same hands"

influence in Congress" (Gobineau 1999: 69). Likewise, he insists that climate and resource availability cannot be responsible for the virility of a people because "the world has seen barbarism and civilization flourishing everywhere, one after the other, on the same soil" (Gobineau 1999: 38).

⁵²³ Interestingly, in light of the uses to which his theory was later put by his imitators, one of the primary examples that he gives as proof of the unimportance of climate in determining the well-being of a people is that of the Biblical Jews who, despite living in an inhospitable climate, became "in this miserable corner of the earth... a people that succeeded in everything it undertook, a free, strong, and intelligent people, and one which, before it lost, sword in hand, the name of an independent nation, had given as many learned men to the world as it had merchants" (Gobineau 1999: 59).

(Gobineau 1999: 26). In seeking to understand contemporary social degeneration, Gobineau reaches the startling and seemingly self-evident conclusion that civilizations lose their vitality because they are literally no longer composed of the same people that founded them. And in demonstrating all of this, as we shall see, Gobineau will rely completely on comparing society to a natural phenomenon (Biddiss 1970: 114). As Beasley writes, this explanation is Gobineau's "great achievement... the explanation for the degeneration of a whole people" because, in his own mind, it served to found social theory on a basis as certain as the findings of the anatomists about the workings of the human body (Beasley 2010: 53).

It is necessary then for Gobineau to explain how a nation can change its "blood" for the worse, and in so doing he relies on an examination of the differences that he perceives between the races and from this how their miscegenation determines the destiny of a people. It should be noted first of all, even if it is at first sight surprising, that while Gobineau concedes that the "undeniable superiority" in beauty of "the inhabitants of Europe and of South and West Asia" when compared to the rest of the world seems to point to a diverse origin, he judges this without apparent contradiction by the standards of Classical beauty developed in European culture, he nonetheless rejects the idea of polygenesis, that the races are separate species (Gobineau 1999: 107). He argues that the lack of intellectual ability of the so-called savage peoples had been exaggerated and disputes the idea that even the "lowest type" of human being is so little possessed of "reason and understanding" as to be "on a level with the monkey" (Gobineau 1999: 154). This is because all human beings are able to pass judgement on their world in a way unavailable to the other animals and because all alike have an equal capacity to receive the Christian faith which distinguishes even the most primitive of men from "the most intelligent of beasts" (Gobineau 1999: 155). In addition to this, Gobineau claims, perhaps sincerely, that the authority of the Bible precludes the idea that all human beings are not alike descended from Adam and Eve.⁵²⁴ He also writes that the ability of the different races to interbreed, with no evident loss to fertility, makes it "impossible to pronounce categorically in favour of a multiplicity of origin for the human species" (Gobineau 1999: 138).⁵²⁵

⁵²⁴ "If the text is clear, positive, peremptory, and incontestable, we must bow our heads; the greatest doubts must yield, reason can only declare herself imperfect and inferior" (Gobineau 1999: 117).

⁵²⁵ The race mixture which has undeniably occurred since the creation of the world Gobineau argues, as we saw in monogenist fashion, when combined with the continuing fertility of the human species, makes a single point of origin for the races seem likely since a race of human hybrids would conceivably have died out long ago (Gobineau 1999: 116).

Yet, confusingly, after arguing for the common humanity of all people, Gobineau then proceeds to reject the most prevalent theory of monogenesis in his time, that of Buffon already mentioned, that 'savages' could "attain a beauty of outline equal to that of the European, and would do so, if they were brought up under similar conditions " (Gobineau 1999: 117). The lack of influence of climate on an individual once the races are formed, Gobineau asserts, referring to the Jews, can be seen by the supposed consistency in their physical appearance in the different regions of the world despite having felt the influence of these diverse climates for thousands of years (Gobineau 1999: 122). Gobineau claims that the races are so different from each other in their capacities that they, for all intents and purposes, are irreconcilable and therefore effectively function as separate species.⁵²⁶ In other words, Gobineau seems to be hedging his bets here, since the debate over monogenesis versus polygenesis had yet to be resolved at the time of his writing the Essay. He puts forward a theory that is undeniably polygenetic in nature while arguing for monogenesis. He seems to reject the principle argument in support of monogenesis while at the same time arguing for a monogenesis that is effectively polygenetic in implication. Perhaps he feared that by coming out too strongly on one side or the other of the argument, his theory would be discredited by being dragged into a debate that it did not depend on.

Gobineau's explanation for the origin of racial division is, then, ironic given his claims above, that it results from environmental "causes acting for a definite period of time" on early man (Gobineau 1999: 114). But this apparent contradiction must be put in the context of his view of nature as a finished product so as not to conflict with his earlier claim that climate has no impact on a people's development. He argues that in the aftermath of the creation of the Earth and all its creatures by God, nature existed for several thousand years in an uncompleted state of profound turmoil and that the general strife that characterized life at this time exerted a profound effect on everything including men (Gobineau 1999: 136).⁵²⁷ Adamite man, then, of whom Gobineau writes, contradicting Buffon and others who we have seen made him a member of the White race, is a creature of whom "it is impossible to know anything" (Gobineau 1999: 145). And Adam was quickly followed by the emergence of diverse human types that reflected the

⁵²⁶ Mankind is thus "no less completely and definitely split into separate parts, than it would be if specific differences were due to a real divergence of origin," (Gobineau 1999: 125) or again, "this permanence of racial qualities is quite sufficient to generate the radical unlikeness and inequality that exists between the different branches, to raise them to the dignity of natural laws" (Gobineau 1999: 133).

⁵²⁷ As he writes, "the creatures exposed to these tremendous forces were more liable to be affected by them than existing types would be," (Gobineau 1999: 139) and "the influence of the natural causes was far more active than it is now" (Gobineau 1999: 137).

period of instability brought about by a harsh and volatile climate. Men spread across the globe and as a consequence were affected by climate in different ways even though they still resembled one another, just as the lion and the tiger resemble each other today. The struggle for survival against the elements and the influence of nature upon physiology caused groups of men in isolation from one another to form separately, and it is this that was responsible for the racial division into White, Black, and Yellow. These racial distinctions became permanent as nature attained its final, completed form, its "normal and healthy conditions" (Gobineau 1999: 137). After this nature essentially became benign, passive and static, and thus ceased to have any effect on the development of racial character.

For Gobineau nature as something completed means that it has become equally controllable by man's reason everywhere, and so, in contrast to what was the case when the balance was in nature's favour, it is now men that shape nature. Consequently, if the members of some ethnicities are unable to control nature with the same facility that the Europeans have all across the globe, this shows that the indigenous races of these regions are deficient in comparison to their White cousins.⁵²⁸ Races must be distinct for Gobineau because their cultures have evolved differently once nature attained its finished aspect. If the races had equally possessed the same qualities, they would have proceeded in history to become identical no matter what their location on the globe because they "would have judged their needs in the same way, asked nature for the same things, and viewed her from the same angle" (Gobineau 1999: 169). The fact that this did not occur, that there is a distinction in the way that groups of humans live, demonstrates, for Gobineau, that they are inherently different. All of this shows Gobineau's complete physiological determinism along with his incredible hubris about the "completed" natural world.

⁵²⁸ "The tribes that were unlucky enough to live on a barren soil, at the bottom of rocky gorges, on the shores of ice-bound seas, or on steppes for ever swept by the north-winds, these might have had to battle against the unkindness of nature for a longer time than the more favoured peoples. But in the end, having no less wisdom and understanding than the others, they would not have been backward in discovering that the rigours of a climate has its remedies. They would have shown the intelligent activity we see to-day among the Danes, the Norwegians, and the Icelanders. They would have tamed the rebellious soil, and forced it, in spite of itself, to be productive" (Gobineau 1999: 169).

The Division of the Races

Gobineau labels the White, Black, and Yellow races "secondary" because they came after the original man, Adam. But this distinction is qualified by Gobineau when he writes that "it is probable that none of the three original types was ever found in absolute simplicity" (Gobineau 1999: 147). For Gobineau, in other words, the threefold division is a kind of heuristic as many more groups could have emerged following Adam in the chaos of primordial nature. And in the same way it is also not skin colour in itself that matters when determining racial capacity. He is clever enough to realise that this would be an arbitrary basis of distinction and asserts that he uses skin colour to identify the races only to make his ideas intelligible to the public. Instead, Gobineau stresses that he is more interested in physiological distinctions between the races, which he claims reflect their different intellectual abilities (Gobineau 1999: 146). He argues that race is a range of potential whereby "the activity, energy, and intelligence of the least gifted individuals in the dominant races, are greater than the same qualities in the corresponding specimens produced by the other groups" (Gobineau 1999: 181). Once again, he stresses that his ideas do not apply to individuals because this would render them unscientific, meaning in his terms that they would not cause human behaviour but be caused by them.⁵²⁹ In any case, though, as we are about to see, this threefold racial division mirrors Gobineau's own perception of the class system in his native France and extends his generalizations about his own country to the entirety of the human race, with workers being analogous to Blacks, the bourgeoisie to the Yellows, and the aristocrats to the Whites (Davies 1988: 25).⁵³⁰

It is worth reiterating here that at the point of writing the Essay, Gobineau had barely interacted with non-Whites. Instead, Gobineau's examination of the qualities of the Black and Yellow races relied almost exclusively on secondary sources, in the first place from Voltaire, Montaigne, Montesquieu, and in the second from his contemporaries in the already mentioned

⁵²⁹ As Gobineau humorously writes, apparently quoting Benjamin Franklin, "As to the question of intellectual merit, I absolutely refuse to make use of the argument, 'every negro is a fool.' My main reason for avoiding it is that I should have to recognize, for the sake of balance, that every European is intelligent; and heaven keep me from such a paradox!" (Gobineau 1999: 180).

⁵³⁰ "Here Gobineau presents the basic paradigm of 'culture' versus 'anarchy', in which the civilizing spiritual forces of the racially purer upper classes are in conflict with the degenerate, miscegenated anarchic working class, with its materialistic democratic tendencies. The profoundly conservative basis of Gobineau's position emerges very clearly at this point: the 'inequality' of races, the different aspects of which he spends much time elaborating, means that the capacity does not exist for every human race to become equal with every other, and as far as this argument is concerned, race is indistinguishable from class" (Young 1995: 107).

works of Edwards and Knox (Young 1995: 95). Gobineau also likely drew on the discussion of the ugliness of blacks in comparison to whites in the eighteenth century German anthropologist Christoph Meiners' *The Outline of History of Mankind* and in the philosopher Karl Carl Gustav Carus' 1849 work *On the Unequal Capacity of Different Races for Further Cultural Development*.⁵³¹ For Gobineau, it is the Black race that "stands at the foot of the ladder" because its members most closely resemble animals and so are the least human (Gobineau 1999: 205). The animal character of the Blacks is attested by the "shape of the pelvis" by a "low receding brow" and by a sense of "taste and smell" that is developed far beyond that found in the other two races (Gobineau 1999: 205). Blacks in fact are so animalistic that they behave and think like a "human machine" in that they are totally indifferent to their own lives as well as to the well-being of others and have a general inability to check their appetites (Gobineau 1999: 206). They are also highly emotional and thus easily aroused, and are undeveloped mentally and spiritually with the result that Gobineau claims that Blacks often do not even struggle against death but simply accept it. In a sense the Blacks are a race of dreamers; they are highly imaginative but lack the self-discipline and ingenuity to put what they can conceive of into action. Their lack of intelligence also leaves the Blacks prey to abstraction. This makes them uncritical and easy to rule but also necessitates that "strict despotism... is the only way of governing the negro" (Gobineau 1999: 207).

The Yellow race, in contrast, is the "exact opposite" of the Black and "clearly superior" to it (Gobineau 1999: 206). Yellows are apathetic in their emotional responses, and are prone to ennui and lethargy. They are dull and have great difficulty understanding what is not in their immediate experience.⁵³² Like Napoleon's nation of shopkeepers, the Yellows are entirely conservative in their political and moral outlook, and want everything in moderation. And thus as a people who wants nothing in excess, the Yellows desire to simply live in the quietest and most comfortable way possible. The ideal of the Yellows is to reach a sort of plateau of basic well-being and to maintain themselves there indefinitely. Yellows have a natural "love of utility and a respect for order" that makes them ideal citizens but also results in cultural stagnation (Gobineau 1999: 206). The undeveloped nature of their emotions means that they commit "none of the strange excesses so common among negroes." The fact that members of the Yellow race

⁵³¹ For more information on Gobineau's race theory and its drawings from natural history see: (Smith: 1984).

⁵³² The Yellows are the least creative and the most practically minded of the races. They do "not dream or theorize" and thus "tend to mediocrity in everything."

are moderate in their desires also means that they tend to have an abnormally high degree of will-power that expresses itself in obstinacy.

The race that has none of the deficiencies of the other two, which in fact is a sort of happy medium between them, is of course the White Race. It is essential to realize here, though, that by "White" Gobineau did not mean his European contemporaries. White men, as far as he was concerned, had ceased to exist long ago. When Gobineau uses the term White he is referring strictly to the Aryans, a group that "it would be fruitless to try to identify... in the hybrid agglomeration that constitutes what we call the 'White race'" (Gobineau 1999: 147). All "White" people living today are the product of race mixture and are consequently irredeemably degenerated from his ideal. The Aryan remains most prevalent, for Gobineau, in the populations of Great Britain and Scandinavia, accounting for the world leadership and highly stable nature of these nations, it is they alone who have "conserved a sure portion of the Arian essence" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 29). Germany, where he writes that "variations of race are infinite," is, in contrast, a country riddled by thousands of years of miscegenation, which accounts for its frequent social strife and political disunity (Gobineau 1999: 103). Gobineau uses the terms German and Germanic as synonymous with Aryan only when he refers to the Germanic tribes that conquered the Roman Empire in the fifth century, as we shall touch on momentarily. But even this group was a mere branch of the Aryan family and was not meant to refer to Aryans as such (Eugène 2000: 11).

In any case, whites, or Aryans, are in Gobineau's sense a people "gifted with reflective energy, or rather with an energetic intelligence" (Gobineau 1999: 207). They love order and utility but unlike the Yellows do not reify it, obeying it only when it is advantageous to liberty, not to vegetate but to fulfill the higher ideas that they are capable of achieving because of their extraordinary perseverance. Like the Blacks, the Whites have imagination but are practically minded enough to put their ideas into action. It is the Whites alone who are capable of taking risks and going beyond themselves, as it were, to put off immediate interests for the sake of farsighted goals. But the intellectual and spiritual superiority of the Whites is balanced by an "inferiority in the intensity of their sensations" (Gobineau 1999: 207). This is because the White man is less absorbed in his body than the others, either in its sensuality, as for the Blacks, or in concerns for its protection, as is the case for the Yellows. The result of this is that, the Whites can put their bodies toward far more vigorous and productive pursuits than is possible for the

other races. The Whites are also capable of appreciating life more than the Blacks or the Yellows, knowing "better how to use it, and so, as it would seem, set a greater price on it; both in their own persons and those of others" (Gobineau 1999: 207). Because of this the Whites are merciful and altruistic, and are capable of reflecting on their own actions in a way not possible for the other races. The lethargy and mediocrity that is inherent in the Black and Yellow races also means that it is the White Race that "originally possessed the monopoly of beauty, intelligence, and strength" among human beings (Gobineau 1999: 209). All in all, then, nature produced a sort of miracle in the White race. The existence of the Aryan is the divine spark with which Gobineau attempts to solve the age-old problem of why men live and evidently think differently than the other animals. And this thesis, Gobineau believed, was irrefutably borne out by both the archaeological and philological record as well as by the domination of the Globe in his own time by the European nations, where the White strain undeniably remained the most vigorous.

The Fall of Man and Racial Miscegenation

Gobineau next makes the highly original claim, which is the backbone of his theory that racial miscegenation is the cause of everything in history and that culture and human activity are its reflections, that the traits identified as uniquely possessed by the Whites signify that they alone are capable of creating civilization. Many have commented on Gobineau's seeming obsession with declinism.⁵³³ Yet by implication what causes the rise of a civilization will also be responsible for its decline through its absence. Gobineau's association of the loss of racial vitality with every sort of decline then serves to account for every kind of growth and at the same time to provide a theory of the past and a blueprint for the future (Buenzod 1967: 471). Gobineau, in the hugely ambitious endeavour of trying to account for the variation of all cultures throughout the world and throughout history, would project the longstanding aristocratic view of the race struggle in France onto the entire human race by identifying the Aryans with the Franks and other Germanic tribes that conquered the Roman Empire in the fifth century (Arendt 1958: 165). He would argue, as we shall see, that it was through contact with the Aryans that every

⁵³³ For instance, Arendt writes that "the most surprising aspect of the theory, set forth in the midst of the optimistic nineteenth century, is the fact that the author is fascinated by the fall and hardly interested in the rise of civilizations" (Arendt 1958: 171).

civilization in history had developed and that the relative state of a community's advancement or decline was in direct proportion to the degree to which this Aryan element—its resemblance to its founders by blood—had been retained in the contemporary population.⁵³⁴ Using incredibly rich imagery that testifies to his literary skill as a writer of fiction, Gobineau writes that the history of civilization,

"has the semblance of an immense tapestry... The cloth is not of one colour only; it is not composed of a single material... The two inferior types of our species, the Black race and the Yellow, are the coarse background, the cotton and the wool, which the secondary races produced by mixture with the White race soften into a silk blend, such that the Arian group, weaving its finer threads through ennobled generations, applies to their surface, a dazzling masterpiece, a motif of silver and gold" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 318).

Without race mixture with the Whites, the Blacks and the Yellows would have languished in a permanent state of submersion to instinct or in lethargy.⁵³⁵ They "would have crawled for ever at the feet of the lowest of the Whites," in a state akin to the animals and below what we today consider to be human (Gobineau 1999: 208). Gobineau depicts this state of primitive isolation as natural, even if in practical terms it has never existed in its pure state, because it is analogous to the way the species remain separate in nature. He claims that the resistance that most "savage" tribes show to mixing with outsiders, "the natural repugnance, felt by men and animals alike, to a crossing of blood," is evidence of this isolation (Gobineau 1999: 28). This "secret repulsion from the crossing of blood" also indicates that each ethnic group likely considers itself to be of stock superior to its neighbours (Gobineau 1999: 29). And in this sense Gobineau argues that the idea of racial superiority is "one of the oldest and most widely held opinions in the world," one that was forgotten as the races mixed, but has been rediscovered through his own research (Gobineau 1999: 36).

Conceivably the Aryans in their original isolation possessed all the qualities that Gobineau identifies as pertaining to the White race. Their society, because free of race mixture,

⁵³⁴ As Gobineau writes in the preface to the Essay, "everything great, noble and fruitful in the works of man on this earth, in science, art, and civilization, derives from a single starting-point; it belongs to one family alone, the different branches of which have reigned in all the civilized countries of the universe" (Gobineau 1999: XIII).

⁵³⁵ Interaction with the white race is the "catalyst" of civilization (Buenzod 1967: 384).

would be free of internal strife. All the Aryans, being of the same physiological nature, would think and act identically, even if perhaps some as individuals would still naturally be superior in some ways to their fellows. This hive-mind-like utopia would seem to exclude our contemporary conception of what qualifies as society and civilization. It would render civilization more of an individual enterprise in that the Aryans as a group would have no need to work together as a larger entity, ironically, because of their similarity to one another by virtue of their common lifestyle and ideas. They would not require society due to their perfect corporate individuality (André 1990: 61). This state of splendid isolation would not last long, though, because the innate superiority of the Aryans over the immediate term would prevent them from remaining in isolation from each other and from the other human groups. And it is this that Gobineau argues ultimately creates civilization as we know it, in the sense of a second nature that surrounds the individual and binds them through a set of cultural practices inherited through group membership.

Gobineau indicates that human groups almost inevitably become fused, in the first place, despite their innate desire for isolation, by virtue of their physical resemblance and owing to a common ability to communicate with one another (Gobineau 1999: 181). The Aryan especially is inevitably driven, through a sort of natural process, to participate in and win a struggle for power and resources with the other human races (Gobineau 1999: 28). Warfare between groups, in its first stages, would result in the taking of slaves from a conquered people. This would then be followed by the outright annexation of land when the more ambitious of aggressors egged on by the weakness of an enemy chose to retain the territory of a conquered people and thus form a truly heterogeneous population. The conqueror and conquered would gradually become more and more interdependent by virtue of the common interest that arises from living in the same polity. And thus the distinction between the two would gradually fade and then vanish with the more useful individuals in the subject population gradually taking positions of authority and power and eventually mixing their blood with their former masters (Gobineau 1999: 28). And so, "from the very day when the conquest is accomplished and the fusion begins, there appears a noticeable change of quality in the blood of the masters" (Gobineau 1999: 31). Gobineau argues that a conquering race is almost always fewer in number than those it conquers owing to the fact that its innate superiority allows it to punch above its numerical weight. A conquering race and its noble descendants also tend to be more active in the state and in warfare, and are,

therefore, at a greater risk of premature death. Thus, members of a superior race following a conquest "are the victims, first of their original smallness in number, and then of a host of secondary causes which combine together for their destruction" (Gobineau 1999: 32).⁵³⁶

It is the misfortune of the Aryans that their innate superiority, essentially, makes it impossible for them not to turn their neighbours into subjects, "continually forcing them to mix their blood with that of others" (Gobineau 1999: 149). Intriguingly, Gobineau argues that the conquest of an inferior by a superior race even occurs when the superior race, i.e. the Aryans, is defeated in war. Conceivably this would be possible only through the influence of some

⁵³⁶ The best example of Gobineau's racial perspective on the life and death of civilization in the Essay is his extensive discussion of the rise and fall of Rome in the Essay's third volume. As Figueira suggests, for Gobineau, the fall of Rome "represented the pivotal moment in history" (Figueira 2012: 74). Rome is all important for Gobineau, in the first place, because its conquest by the Germanic-Aryans in the fifth century laid the groundwork for modern Europe, whose alleged racial degeneration so preoccupies him, and, in the second, because of the parallels that he draws between its decline and the decadence of his own times. Gobineau writes that Rome's great success owed to the Sabine origin of much of its population, "the most numerous portion and the most influential of this nationality" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 255). He argues that the Sabines, as part of the relatively unmixed "Italiot civilization," were predominantly Aryan with some Yellow admixture (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 256).

The Romans thus became a "male" utilitarian race, due to the relative absence of Black blood in the population (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 255). In its early days Rome's dominance was assured because it was principally in competition for control over the Italian peninsula with an inferior highly hybridized population of Etruscans and Latins, on one side, and Greeks in Magna Graecia, on the other. Rome also managed to augment its racial stock in the fourth century before Christ through its conquest of another Italiot people, the Samnites. Following their subjugation, the Samnites, an Italian people in Gobineau's terms although less Aryan than the descendants of the Sabines, came to primarily constitute the Roman lower class of Plebeians. This union of two predominantly Aryan peoples formed a racial powerhouse whereby the lower order was very conservative, valuing the maintenance of the family and reasonable government, and thus desirous of expanding "its role without wishing to completely arrogate the rule of the patricians" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 266). The result was an extraordinary degree of harmony and common purpose across the state that produced a period of internal stability that coincided with the Roman Republic's greatest period of growth.

Nevertheless, following the pattern that he identifies with every civilization, Gobineau asserts that superiority brought with it the infusion of inferior blood, through conquest, and so gradually miscegenation and social degeneration. As he explains later in his Essay, naturalistically comparing people to a metallic substance, he terms the Romans of the Late Republic and Empire "Semetic" to signify that the majority of the population "was composed of an alloy that consisted to greater or lesser degree of Black blood" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 337). Rome's conquests caused an influx of slaves into Italy, the "vagabonds of the known world," and they brought with them "every societal disease" imaginable to debase and destabilize the existing order (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 263). The mass of the conquered soon became "stifling" as the Romans melted into this racial hodgepodge (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 284).

When the "barbarians" of the North began making inroads into the Empire in the third century and thereafter, Gobineau claims that Rome was already in deep decay from its internal racial degeneration. Rome, like a human being at the end of their natural lifespan, consisted of "a body exhausted and moribund" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 108). Consequently, the Germanic tribes possessing an extraordinary "purity of blood," who Gobineau of course envisions as being of the Aryan stock, did not come simply as conquerors of Rome but as saviours (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 150). The German, possessing "blond hair, a White ruddy complexion, wide shoulders, great of stature, vigorous... clever, supple, fearing nothing in the world" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 355), came to protect and conserve what little of civilization the Roman world, that is to say of the Aryan legacy, managed to survive the influx of inferior races (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 3, 357).

extraneous variable such as a natural disaster. For instance, he writes of the Punic Wars that the Carthaginians, even if they had conquered Rome, would nevertheless have been absorbed by the Italian population, which he believed to have a greater consistency of Aryan blood, and so would have eventually become subject to the Romans culturally because of their biological superiority. "The final result would have been exactly the same. The destiny of civilization is not a matter of chance; it does not depend on the toss of a coin" (Gobineau 1999: 35). It is incredible to think here that for Gobineau, through his obsession with rooting man's activity so exclusively in the natural characteristic of race, natural forces themselves can have no influence on man's behaviour. Man is, in other words, so removed from the natural world, paradoxically through his dependence on something that binds him with the force of nature, he is so much the prisoner of race, that he cannot even be influenced by the external world.

And it is this inevitable conquest, Gobineau argues, combining the self-discipline of the Aryans with the imaginative and sensual qualities of the Black on the one hand, and the practical mindedness of the Yellow on the other, that forms the basis of all civilization. He writes, in support of this, that it is precisely where the Blacks and Yellows have remained the most isolated from the Whites, in the Amazon jungle or in the deserts of Australia, that they have remained the least developed or civilized. The inherent potential of the non-White races could, in other words, only be unleashed by the vigour and tenacity of the Whites. And while purely Black and Yellow mixtures do exist, Gobineau claims that these people "have no history at all" because lacking dynamism they do not rise above the animal (Gobineau 1999: 149). It is combination with the racial energy of the Aryan that enables the traits of the other races to be made social, that is to say developed beyond their earliest inklings in the passions or intransigence of the Blacks and Yellows as individuals, where they surely would have remained if not for contact with Whites.⁵³⁷

Where White mixes with Black, Gobineau argues, following the ideas of Gustave Klemm whose work he acknowledges in the Essay but claims to have never read (Gobineau 1999: 86), a "feminine" speculative culture is created, the best example being that of the Hindus. Where White mixes with Yellow, Gobineau states that a "masculine" utilitarian mindset results, with the archetypal example being Chinese civilization (Gobineau 1999: 87). Gobineau writes that all civilization, and indeed all ideas and human activity, is the product of an oscillation between

⁵³⁷ In the Essay Gobineau extensively attempts to demonstrate that the Chinese, Hindu, Egyptian, Greek, Italian, Assyrian, Incan, Aztec, Alleghanian (meaning a supposed parent civilization of many of the indigenous peoples of Eastern North American), and ancient Germanic were all civilizations founded by Aryans.

these two principles, which reflect racial miscegenation. It is only where one of these elements is present that a civilization can truly emerge by extending actions beyond the level of the individual to attain a cultural value (Gobineau 1999: 88). Cultural characteristics are in this way completely grounded in material considerations. They are purely the product of physiology and so are natural. It is the degree or ratio of miscegenation between the races, then, that is responsible for the cultural characteristics that define a particular civilization. Even languages for Gobineau can be divided into masculine and feminine strains reflecting their racial origin. As Spring writes, Gobineau continually emphasizes that languages "are individual, relatively independent beings and not the product of the human mind" (Spring 1995: 75).

Gobineau, who unlike many of his European contemporaries was actually fluent in many eastern languages, writes that in seeking to understand a language "we must fix our eyes solely on the race by which, and for which, the language was at first designed" (Gobineau 1999: 203). He claims that in the original instance there was a "perfect correspondence" between the racial characteristics of the speaker and his language and that at one time three main language groups existed, with each belonging to one of the major races. Language, Gobineau argues, develops in a way completely analogous to the race struggle with "higher order" languages, those that are the legacy of the Aryan conquests, deteriorating as they came to be used by speakers who were "unworthy" of them (Gobineau 1999: 204). Just as miscegenation produces male and female cultures, so it also creates languages that are either utilitarian in nature, those of the Orient, or loaded with a "superabundance of philosophical and ethnological terms," as can be seen in Sanskrit and Ancient Greek. The personal character of a member of a race is in the same way also reflected in their language with "the lack of precision in the Semitic tongues," for example, being "exactly paralleled by the character of the Semitic peoples" (Gobineau 1999: 189).⁵³⁸ Gobineau asserts, then, that the resemblance between race and language is undeniable and reasons that, in any case, it is an "absurdity" to believe that language could be the product of individual human activity as this would require the positing of a man in the "abstract" and would thus raise the difficulty of to whom he would be able to communicate his language in the original instance (Gobineau 1999: 189).

⁵³⁸ Again referring to the Jews, Gobineau argues that an everyday example of this can be detected in what he claims is the noticeable difference between their voices and those of the general European population. He argues that this demonstrates that Jews are being made to speak a language not suited to their racial composition (Gobineau 1999: 195).

And just as a language is not itself produced by human beings, is autonomous from human agency, so civilizations too are not dynamic for Gobineau, they are not really the products of human action, but are more like containers which hold and form men. Civilization, he writes "is not an event, but... a state in which a human society subsists" (Gobineau 1999: 77). Civilizations are, in other words, not developmental but fully formed at their creation. They do not result from a series of events because they are not shaped by factors capable of altering them. Such would be a superficial explanation for Gobineau, it would be tautological, rather "civilization has to do with certain elemental conditions which are independent of politics"; one must look "far deeper for the motive-forces that bring them into being, direct, and expand them, make them fruitful or barren and, in a word, mould their whole life" (Gobineau 1999: 78). This completely static conception of human culture and activity of course reflects his race theory. All that is worthwhile about a human group comes from its point of origin at the infusion of the blood of the Aryan, and what follows after this can only be a state of decay as this blood is diluted.⁵³⁹ It is a great departure from the notion of society that we saw in the last chapter since it eliminated every variable formerly taken as capable of shaping civilization rendering them mere reflections of racial characteristics (Biddiss 1970: 117).

What Rousseau identified as the "social," that which forms us as a result of a historical and cultural context *a priori* of our individuality, becomes in Gobineau's theory—in its origin and perpetuation— exclusively a product of the interplay of natural factors, i.e. of race mixture. And this extends to every activity that we would consider distinctly human in the contemporary context. A good example of this is Gobineau's discussion of aesthetics. Completely unlike other racialists, such as his friend Richard Wagner, Gobineau argues that "artistic genius" is not found within any of the races taken individually and "arose only after the intermarriage of White and Black" (Gobineau 1999: 208). Art is produced when the imaginative and sensuous race traits of the Blacks are unleashed by the organizational energy of the Whites enabling the emergence of a technical sophistication capable of producing art that can be learned through a cultural context. Interestingly, as proof of this contention, Gobineau points to what he takes to be the inferiority of European art, poetry, and philosophy when compared to that found in the civilizations of the Middle East and India, which he envisions as the product of Black and White mixture (Gobineau

⁵³⁹ This view of civilization as a fixed quantity would become popular with historians in the twentieth century, such as Arnold Toynbee.

1999: 83). Race mixture as it creates everything that is distinctly human in man's experience, then, enables the development of not just the bad but also the good, of characteristics that even Gobineau himself considers positive. As he writes, "the world of art and great literature that comes from the mixture of blood, the improvement and ennoblement of inferior races - all these are wonders for which we must need be thankful" (Gobineau 1999: 209).⁵⁴⁰

In any case, if the entirety of the social world is a product of racial miscegenation and if the racial composition of the individual directly reflects their capacity to engage in a culture, Gobineau posits that any beneficial effect of race mixture cannot help but in the long run erode the nobility of the highborn at the same time that it raises the low (Buenzod 1967: 423). Such a process will inevitably erase or submerge the Aryan element within a larger mass and this will in turn erode the quality of a culture, and destroy or render ephemeral whatever benefits existed from miscegenation as an aging civilization produces interracial individuals who are unable to engage in the culture of their ancestors. Again, this is because in Gobineau's theory, since race is alone the determining factor for the success and failure of every civilization and for all cultural achievement, an individual cannot choose or learn the elements of a culture that is not suited to their racial composition but, at best, can only ape them. Gobineau speculates that even "the most hideous of bushmen" could be brought to Europe and made to act in a way which corresponds to a rudimentary degree to those around him, but that this would not render him, or his descendants, any more a part of European civilization than if they had remained in Africa (Gobineau 1999: 73). In a way remarkably similar to ideas about animal intelligence in our own time, Gobineau suggests that all human beings are capable of imitation but not creation (Roberts 2008: 17-20).⁵⁴¹ As further evidence of this Gobineau points to the apparent lack of creativity extant within the colonies of the European empires, places where the introduction of European technology,

⁵⁴⁰ Intriguingly, Gobineau's avid interest in art and great artistic ability, would seem to necessitate that in his own mind he may have possessed more than a trace of Black blood. It is interesting to note that some commentators, beginning with Elie Faure, have argued that Gobineau must have suspected that his estranged mother as a native of Martinique was herself the product of interracial miscegenation. Gobineau was also unhappily married to Clémence-Gabrielle Monnerot Destourelles, also of Martinique, with whom he would subsequently have two daughters (Biddiss 1970: 45). Gobineau himself apparently even had brown eyes and brown hair according to his later in life companion the Comtesse de La Tour (Barzun 1965: 59).

⁵⁴¹ As he writes "we often hear of negroes who have learnt music, who are clerks in banking-houses, and who know how to read, write, count, dance, and speak, like White men... The solution is simple. There is a great difference between imitation and conviction. Imitation does not necessarily imply a serious breach with hereditary instincts; but no one has a real part in any civilization until he is able to make progress by himself, without direction from others" (Gobineau 1999: 74).

political systems, and art have had a minimal effect on the native inhabitants in comparison to their original influence in Europe (Gobineau 1999: 75).

Arendt, perhaps retrospectively looking back from the vantage point of the Nuremburg Laws, tries to portray Gobineau's claims about the negative cultural and physical effects of interracial union—that the inferior will gradually overwhelm the superior—simply as an assertion that "in every mixture the lower race is always dominant" because the higher becomes somehow infected or corrupted by the lower (Arendt 1958: 173). But as with many others who have critiqued him, her statement is somewhat flippant and ignores the enormous scope of what he was trying to do. Gobineau's point is more profound and encompassing than a simple condemnation of interracial sexual relations in the name of an illusory racial purity. In discussing the characters of the races, the creative capacity of the Aryan, and the origins of civilization in miscegenation, Gobineau's intent is to show that no human action, whether in the form of education, philosophy, or socialization, can allow a member of one civilization to become the member of another. This means that the racial mixture of superior and inferior stock would, when judged purely by racial composition, inevitably produce an individual somewhat more inferior than their highborn progenitor.⁵⁴² Interracial people could form a sort of hybrid culture among themselves, and Gobineau believed that these were the norm in most of the world in his own time. But for him an individual was incapable of rising above or below the level of culture that their racial composition allowed for the simple reason that they would in every respect be incapable of understanding or participating with it (Gobineau 1999: 179). It is this sort of definitiveness and inescapability, rather than a simple animosity to race mixing as such, that would allow Gobineau's ideas to provide the foundation for twentieth century totalitarian racial theories (Buenzod 1967: 485).⁵⁴³ This is why Gobineau writes that his apparent discovery that "civilization is incommunicable" is the most "striking" proof of the "unlikeness and inequality of races" since in his mind this betrays the degree to which every facet of human existence is structured by race (Gobineau 1999: 171).

The "incommunicability" of civilization is essential for Gobineau because it is also the harbinger of its inevitable decline. This is because the quality of a culture, since it reflects racial

⁵⁴² Gobineau's understanding of genetics is very literal, an individual is fifty percent of each parent.

⁵⁴³ "Anthropology's original sin" was the combining of biology and culture, "It is enough for Gobineau to have committed this sin, to find himself locked in this infernal circle which, from an intellectual error not devoid of good faith, leads to the involuntary legitimisation of all the attempts of discrimination and oppression" (Lévi-Strauss 1963: Vol. 2, 324).

composition, will deteriorate as the blood of the founders, "the primordial race-unit" of Aryans, is diluted by miscegenation and "swamped by the influx of foreign elements" (Gobineau 1999: 25). Gradually every civilization will be "drained of its original blood" and will "lose its intrinsic quality" as the highborn element of the population disappears, with the result that, as Gobineau maintained was the case in France with the destruction of that country's aristocracy, the very name of the nation will even cease to signify what it actually is (Gobineau 1999: 35). This is the lesson Gobineau draws from history.⁵⁴⁴ His racial theory presupposes, then, the idea that a people will never die if it "remains eternally composed of the same national elements" (Gobineau 1999: 33). But from what appears above it is obvious that such a wish is impossible. This constitutes the "tragic paradox," as Todorov put it, of man in civilization for Gobineau (Todorov 1993: 137-138). It is that the very act of creating civilization, of giving life to a cultural world, carries within it the seeds of an inevitable decline, "an evil that nothing can balance or repair" (Gobineau 1999: 209). As Gobineau writes, "If mixtures of blood are, to a certain extent, beneficial to the mass of mankind, if they raise and ennoble it, this is merely at the expense of mankind itself, which is stunted, abased, enervated, and humiliated in the persons of its noblest sons" (Gobineau 1999: 210).⁵⁴⁵

The interesting thing to note here in the context of this work is that Gobineau's conclusions on the inevitability of degeneration imply that every human achievement is for him imperfect because it is accompanied by its opposite, an otherness that overshadows and taints it. As Harris suggests, "original sin" like race mixture for Gobineau "chains humanity to misery" yet at the same time is also the cause of all that is great in man (Harris 2001: 103). Man's actions on earth are imperfect and bad, even when they seem to be good, when compared to the ideal of a primordial perfection. And we can see in this emphasis a parallel to the ideas of Augustine, a connecting thread between Gobineau and the other figures. An ongoing fixation on error as to owing to a human cause, but for Gobineau this error unlike was the case for the others, as we shall see shortly, is ultimately irredeemable. It is thereby society, or rather the racial miscegenation that creates the social, that is the cause of otherness. The human action for him causes otherness is racial miscegenation. The social, or "civilization," causes the aberration from

⁵⁴⁴ "That all civilizations derive from the White race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great or brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it" (Gobineau 1999: 210).

⁵⁴⁵ The end result of this, as we shall see described at the conclusion of the Essay, can only be a mass of confusion and mediocrity as the Aryan element is submerged into a chaos of heterogeneity in which men, in their culture and physicality, become a sort of alphabet soup of everything at once" (Gobineau 1999: 210).

nature that is race mixture and so all that can be considered evil. It is the social that causes the Aryan—as the pinnacle of all that the human species could ever hope to become—to leave his utopian-like existence of primal greatness to descend into the muck of error and confusion through miscegenation. And in this way Gobineau's writings betray an almost pathological hatred of what we consider society. His ideal, as the only means of arresting the inevitable undoing of human physical life itself, seems to be a man or group left in isolation from its fellows, without any of the dynamism that we would associate with culture. Groups must struggle to preserve "the homogeneity necessary to life" (Gobineau 1999: 211). Any mixing at all between human groups would ultimately taint the superior race through contact and so fruitlessly serve only to detract from the Aryan's original greatness. And it is for this reason that, as Biddiss rightly points out, his theory often amounts to "a plea for social stagnation, even perhaps for the abolition of social life itself" (Biddiss 1970: 27). The distinction between Gobineau and Rousseau's theory here could not be more obvious. While for both thinkers it is society that creates imperfection, the social is irredeemable for Gobineau, unlike for Rousseau. As we have seen Rousseau react to the problem of the constitution of society by trying to explain how society functioned to thereby heal it, Gobineau reacts to the problem of group division in society by attempting to do away with it entirely by substituting it for something rooted entirely in nature. And in this ideal of original uniformity there is perhaps also more than a resemblance to Marx's state of primitive communism and the classless society, in which everyone lives in an economic sense in the same way, thus definitively solving the problem of group conflict.

The End of Humanity and History

As mentioned previously, from his youth Gobineau idolized the Early Middle Ages envisioning Europe at this time as a highly regimented, stratified, and immutable society headed by an Aryan ruling class that was exceedingly conscious of its blood lines and strictly endogamous. The degree of isolation of both Europe itself and the communities that populated it, the self-sufficiency of each noble's estate, the confined nature of life in general, all aligned perfectly with Gobineau's hatred of the social and the miscegenation it brings (Biddiss 1970: 128). But feudalism and the appearance of larger states headed by powerful monarchs introduced an element of competition into the Aryan aristocracy that created an opportunity for

the rise of the racially inferior bourgeoisie. The growth of trade and commerce gradually undermined the pre-eminence of the Aryans as well as their racial isolation. As Gobineau phrases it in the *Pleiads*, the "slaves and the sons of slaves having raised their heads, modern society began its witches' Sabbath" (Gobineau 1978: 18). This culminated in the Renaissance, which to Gobineau represented the inevitable revenge of the racially mixed, though more numerous, remnants of the inhabitants of the Roman Empire over their Aryan conquerors. And for him, not surprisingly, it was France that was the prototypical example of this process. The peak of its power and influence had come when the Germanic influence was highest during the reign of Charlemagne and his successors. In the High Middle Ages and Renaissance that followed, the influence of the Celtic and Roman racial stock started to rise, and so the country began to decline and grow more despotic, thereby marginalizing the Aryan aristocracy (Swart 1964: 91). Events culminated in the Revolution of 1789 when the descendants of the Aryans in France were effectively killed off in large numbers, leaving only those with inferior blood in the country, thereby "opening the door to violence and to every democratic atrocity" (Gobineau 1959: 300). And the triumph of the highly miscegenated lower order in France, Gobineau explains, accounts for that country's obsession with equality. He believed that the counter-intuitive notion that equality is something positive, that every human being is capable of possessing the same qualities or powers as every other, can occur only "when the majority of the citizens have mixed blood flowing in their veins," thus erecting "into a universal and absolute truth what is only true for themselves" (Gobineau 1999: 36).

As Gobineau writes of his contemporaries in the Essay, drawing a comparison with the cosmopolitanism of ancient Rome, "everywhere in this great society, and at every time, we can find populations so detached from the existing order as to be ready for the wildest experiments" (Gobineau 1999: 96). The "very irregular proportions" of blood mixture engendered by the race mixing that Gobineau detected in his contemporaries could lead in his determination nowhere else but to a cultural mishmash in which mutually exclusive elements from many different peoples would be brought together in completely unsatisfactory ways. Remember that Gobineau considers civilizations and culture to be like containers or finished products, they do not themselves change, but exist at levels directly reflecting the degree of mixture between the races that constitute them. Excessive heterogeneity within a population, the mixes of mixes of mixes, does not simply cause hybrid cultures to form, but results in original qualities of a culture

disappearing or coming to exist with ones completely unsuited to them. This is because in Gobineau's conception a culture—as it does not depend on human agency—is a wholly self-contained, almost organic, system in which everything harmoniously depends on everything else, since it exactly reflects, or is exclusively created by, the racial composition of a people. Since the elements of a culture are essentially self-constituting, being linked to or deriving existence exclusively from the transcendental of race, they are co-dependent, linked to one another and to nothing else, and drawing from one another to enable the existence of the larger whole. Man in this conception is completely the product of a deterministic system that builds upon itself, while he passively goes through the motions, like an automaton, until the cultural possibilities of his racial composition are fully exhausted or completely unleashed. Disrupting the self-forming, closed system that is culture by introducing incompatible aspects of another culture can result in nothing other than a "confusion" that will become "the main feature of the new product." And "the more this product reproduces itself and crosses its blood, the more the confusion increases" (Gobineau 1999: 151).

The political and social turmoil of the nineteenth century was, for Gobineau, an indication that the Western world was headed for its end because of this racial chaos (Davies 1988: 57), but unlike what he argued occurred at the end of the Roman Empire, no group of unmixed Aryans remained to conquer and reinvigorate it (Beasley 2010: 54). As he writes, "the Germanic race provided all the energy of the Arian variety... After it, the White race has nothing more to give of its strength and activity: all within it is nearly equally squalid, exhausted and lost" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 351). For Gobineau, the Aryans or "the sons of kings" remained scattered throughout Europe, "the genuine surviving offspring of Rollo's men, even Amals and Merovingians" (Gobineau 1978: 18). But their numbers were too small to alter the course of natural history, and even these remnants were irreparably mixed. These "precious particles of their most precious ancestors," as with the Frenchman, Englishman, and German in the *Pleiads* (Gobineau 1978: 18), could at best only hope, through understanding the racial nature of man, to revel in a shared superiority, realize the deception that was the nation-state, and engage together in a high culture in which they alone were capable of participating as elite global citizens. But beyond a sense of solace in mutual satisfaction, all that remained for the small number of men and women who have managed to remain relatively unmixed was to sit back and await the end of civilization.

Mankind is thus doomed to inevitable destruction for Gobineau, and humanity as we know it does not have more than a few thousand more years to live because it is becoming more and more racially mixed. The miscegenated will return to an animal-like existence, "numb in their nullity, like cattle grazing in the stagnant bog water of the Pontine marshes" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 354). This is fated because of the simple fact that the White race constitutes only a minority of the human population and as such "stands opposed to the other two in the relationship of 1 to 2, a sad proportion" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 355). Gobineau's theory, being truly racist, cannot help but end pessimistically, then, because the heroic group, members of the white race, are undeniably in the minority, while for someone like Marx, in contrast, history cannot help but end optimistically because the majority of the population are members of the proletariat. Gobineau here clearly does not seem to consider genocide or breeding programs realistic alternatives for saving the White race as would his racist successors. Slavery, in his mind, given its enormous advantages to the conquerors, followed by miscegenation, would evidently always be a more natural and therefore irrefutably certain course for racial relations to take. In any case, the mixing of the races, as just indicated, will produce a human being who has no distinctive qualities and will thus embody a "mediocrity of all kinds," a "mediocrity of physical force, a mediocrity of beauty, a mediocrity of intellectual aptitudes, men will look alike. Their stature, their traits, their bodily habits... They will have the same degree of physical capacity, the same expressions of their instincts, similar faculties," or as Gobineau phrases it, using the exact word used by all the other figures in this Essay to attack that which failed to abide by their respective systems, the miscegenated will consist of an overwhelming "nothingness" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 354). As he writes, they will fall into an "abyss of nothingness whence no power on earth can rescue them" (Gobineau 1999: 210). This then will open the "era of unity" for human beings, one of true equality whereby all men alike will cease to be anything and so equally worthless (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 353).⁵⁴⁶

Miscegenation leads to the end of racial difference and through this, of personal difference. It is race alone that is responsible for what distinguishes man as an animal from the other animals, and creativity, morality, and spirituality will disappear when men become the same. Men will revert to the sameness of the animal's existence as a species because Gobineau

⁵⁴⁶ "One man will have the negro's hair, another the eyes of a Teuton, a third will have a Mongolian face, a fourth a Semetic figure; and yet all these will be akin!" (Gobineau 1999: 150).

maintains that like them they will all literally be identical. Under such circumstances, culture becomes an impossibility. Culture as an expression of racial mixing cannot exist in a world in which everyone is physically identical precisely because the similarity in life would render all cultural knowledge, that which is passed down through a sociohistorical context, obsolete. This is simply owing to the fact that the act of being biologically the same and so thinking the same would, in Gobineau's terms, seem to preclude the need for the inheritance of a built cultural world of any sort, a second nature, since men would presumably come to live in original nature identically, generation after generation, as the racial mixing that drives history ceases. What, in other words, would an older generation have to teach the younger that it could not learn on its own if each were identical? Essentially what this means is that once the human miracle that is the Aryan element is absorbed or extinguished, mankind will revert to the animal-like existence of the original Black and Yellow races. Men will become creatures without individuality and so without history and incapable of any sort of meaningful change. As Spring writes of Gobineau's ultimate human form, "one pictures straggling hordes... returned to primitive savagery, as the last inhabitants of the earth" (Spring 1995: 105).

Gobineau and Otherness

Gobineau presented a truly innovative and groundbreaking theory, one which was squarely rooted in the past yet wholly new, unlike anything else that had appeared before, and that, notwithstanding the repugnance of its subject matter, was just as massive in scope and presentation as the ideas presented by any of the other figures examined in this work.⁵⁴⁷ Gobineau used history as a means of coming to terms with his own contemporary perception of otherness. He promised no less than to unearth the "reasons for those social evils... among all the nations that ever lived, as well as those which survive today—evils that in all likelihood will exist among nations yet unborn" (Gobineau 1999: IX-X). The notion that all error is solvable in some way, because it is caused by one thing, necessitates that decline points the way to the solution and also presupposes that people in the past lived in ignorance of what constituted their nature, thereby explaining contemporary degradation. Gobineau certainly envisioned himself as

⁵⁴⁷ It was "a fully furnished intellectual edifice in which race explained everything in the past, present, and future. Racism was the answer to the ills of his own times; at one and the same time an explanation of the past and a guide to the present" (Gobineau 1995: Preface by Mosse VII).

living in just such a time of decline, like the other figures, something that went hand in hand with his belief that contemporary problems had put what went wrong with human beings into stark relief and, therefore, how all error had emerged from a primordial action that caused human misery. And in this Gobineau too looked back to a better past and traced from an imagined primordial fall all the error that had supposedly followed from it. Gobineau here, like the others, also believed that all that was wrong in human life had a single cause, being the product of an original error, and thereby responded to contemporary problems in a monomaniacal way by making them completely indistinguishable from this factor. Arendt is clearly wrong, as this work has demonstrated, when she comments that "nobody before Gobineau thought of finding one single reason, one single force according to which civilization always and everywhere rises and falls" (Arendt 1958: 171). As we have seen the monomaniacal focus on a single factor is a necessary correlate to the idea of a man made case of error. Yet she is correct in arguing that history had only begun in human terms for Gobineau with race mixture and consequently that all events in history could only be perceived through the lens of race. Like the other figures, Gobineau saw men in their primordial state as existing implicitly according to their nature, i.e. the races were isolated from one another. Modern man has the capacity to discover his own nature through contrasting himself with them. In seeking to discover the cause of these "evils," then, Gobineau looked to the past and discovered that the origin of every human problem resided in the inability of man to understand his true nature and so in activity that departed from what man actually was. Gobineau describes his own research in the preface to the Essay in precisely these terms, writing that he has descended "lamp in hand, by the obscure paths of philosophy and history; and in the analysis of the human heart or the careful search among the annals of the past... (in order to find) the master-key to the enigma which has so long baffled the imagination of man" (Gobineau 1999: IX-X).

And Gobineau's avowed historicism led him to conceive of his race theory as being akin to a law of nature and posit that its incontrovertibility resides in the fact that in every instance it completely binds man just as nature binds all of its creatures. Gobineau envisioned his theory of human action as akin to the principles discovered through natural science because, as Todorov suggests, for him there could be no "qualitative difference" between the two (Todorov 1993: 124). In the conclusion he states that race, as far as human beings are concerned, "must be ranked among the cosmic agents of premier degree.. analogous to those of electricity and

magnetism exerting... (an influence on all) other points of creation" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 329). Or again in the introduction where his confidence in the race theory causes him to write that the mists of superstition "now lift and dissolve under the sun of science" (Gobineau 1999: X). As Herman aptly comments, perhaps drawing on the solar metaphor above, in Gobineau's own mind his race theory was "as revolutionary as Copernicus's discovery that the sun and not the earth is at the center of the solar system" (Herman 2007: 63-64). And it is precisely this sort of confidence in the truth of his claims that would lead Gobineau to conclude the Essay with the startling statement that by grounding human action in natural causes he had finally put forth "real history, a serious and not fantastic history," and so established it as "a certain science that we can see with our eyes, hear with our ears, and touch with our hands" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 340).⁵⁴⁸ It was the totality of his race theory, its promise of providing certainty on every facet of man's existence, that lent it an unassailability which, even with its implications for subjectivity, demanded an unyielding quasi-religious faith, as we also saw was true of the solutions to otherness proffered by the other figures.

Gobineau's obsession with grounding history in an objective science is supremely ironic in that he professed to hate materialism, to stand against everything in contemporary culture that served to detract from the pursuit of higher ideals and nobility for their own sakes. As an artist and aristocrat, he equally detested the philistinism of the lower orders and the money grubbing of the bourgeoisie. Yet he nevertheless felt impelled in putting forth a theory which purported to defend the ideal, to present it in the most material terms and to equate all that is perhaps distinct in human action when compared to the rest of nature with natural forces. In his correspondence with Tocqueville, Gobineau inexplicably attempts to deny that his theory was actually a kind of materialism. "By telling you what is happening and what is going to happen," Gobineau writes shortly after the publication of the Essay's last two volumes in 1854, "am I taking something away from you? I am not a murderer; neither is the doctor who announces the coming of the end" (Gobineau 1959: 285). There seems to have been a disconnect in Gobineau's own mind between his need to construct a theory based on nature to come to grips with the failure of the promise of the social and the dehumanizing implications of linking human behaviour so

⁵⁴⁸ Gobineau here, no doubt referring to Rousseau, among others, contrasts the earnest diligence of his own historical research with the "games" of "the theorists of the Revolution" who formed "a collection of imaginary beings out of clouds, and... (moved) these chimeras about like marionettes, in a political environment manufactured to suit them" (Gobineau 1999: XI).

completely to such a theory. He continues in the same letter that his Essay was as "devoid of anti-morality, as are geology, medicine, archaeology. My book is research, exposition, presentation of facts. These facts exist or they don't. There is nothing else to say" (Gobineau 1959: 286). Gobineau was not a dense man. On everything that he pursued he proved supremely gifted, but he was oblivious to the contradiction, as I argue above, owing to the fact that the social problem that he sought to respond to as inherited from the Jacobin view of society, the legacy of Rousseau and the Revolution, necessitated naturalistic solutions that, like it or not, eliminated human agency.⁵⁴⁹

As we saw with the other figures, there is a complex of ideas that accompany the notion that man caused otherness and therefore that only total obedience to a system capable of providing a definitive solution has the potential to deliver him from it. These ideas, being so singular in focus and thereby exclusive, in turn help to destroy the ability of the subject to participate with otherness in ways not proscribed by the imagined solution. Gobineau's race theory depends on all of these ideas with the exception, as noted above, of free will, since he implicitly relies on a naturalism that destroys it. Gobineau ironically, given the natural basis of his theory, subscribes to the human exceptionalism found in the other figures. "I have shown the unique place in the organic world occupied by the human species, the profound physical, as well as moral, differences separating it from all other kinds of living creatures" (Gobineau 1999: 205). Like them also, as we saw in his discussion of the Black race, Gobineau links animality to "the exaggerated development of instinct" and distinguishes it from the higher sort of existence of a life guided by intellect (Gobineau 1999: 181). Possessing greater intelligence, in other words, is equated with being more alive. And those who do not live up to Gobineau's racial ideal, as we just saw, are also "nothing" they are less alive, they lack reality and so a right to exist because one way of being is alone taken as having any validity. In Gobineau, of course, this distinction is especially pronounced because the ascribed nature of race means that a person is less alive by his very nature, i.e. racial composition, which is obvious to all and self-evident. The racialized subject can never hope to overcome his degradation, it is predestined, and so can simply be discarded by his betters like a piece of trash. Although Gobineau wrote his Essay a hundred years before the Holocaust and likely would have been horrified by its atrocities, it is

⁵⁴⁹ And Tocqueville correctly pointed out in response to Gobineau's claims that notwithstanding his apparent denial of the materialist bent of the Essay, "it is certain that the materialism of many peoples will nonetheless gain strength from it" (Tocqueville 1959: 306).

nevertheless clear that such ideas, when taken to their furthest extent, pave the way for genocide through "a gradually more insistent distinction between true men and those who are virtually half-human or even sub-human" (Biddiss 1970: 267).

Similarly, all of existence can only be used legitimately for Gobineau when it becomes a means to an end for supporting his solution to the problem of otherness. As he writes in the Essay, "steam-power and the various industrial discoveries, they too, like printing, are most excellent means, but not ends in themselves" (Gobineau 1999: 166). The things and activities that make up life are so fully taken up into Gobineau's monomania that they only have value when they are used to bring about something else. But this something else is nothing other than what they already are. The world must be used to match and uphold racial character. The racial capacities of a people must be used to reinforce or further their existing racial capacities. And a failure to do this on the part of a people must undoubtedly be the product of degraded racial capacities. In reality, means and ends come down to the same thing: they are identical because adherence to the power of race renders all other considerations moot. In the same way, as pointed out through his discussion of the implications of the Punic Wars, man for Gobineau is so much the prisoner of the natural factor of race, so cut off from the world because his determinism is so pronounced, that his behaviour cannot, ultimately, even be influenced by natural forces themselves. Man's experience of the world, then, can really only take place through the lens of race. The world has no bearing on him beyond this characteristic. Nature's passivity here is matched only by the passivity of man. Man can fool himself as to the real state of his existence and so become ineffective in his actions—he can erect illusions—but this does not impact upon nature because ultimately its operation, like his own, is completely mechanical and static. And even his misconceptions of nature will themselves be the result of the operation of the natural characteristic of race. The division between man and the world is thereby total, paradoxically, by virtue of man's very naturalness, his submission to a transcendental. Man and nature exist in silos in that they are completely beholden to inescapable natural laws and can exercise no influence upon each other independently of these laws. Man can understand the world and natural forces, and so harness it to his own actions, but even in doing this, he is merely the conduit by which one aspect of nature subsumes another to its own ends, since his behaviour is driven by the natural laws of race. In this way also all of man's actions, because they cannot

help but be aligned with nature, acquire the aura of naturalness. Thus, whatever man does to nature and to other men becomes inevitably natural.

The restrictions placed on agency here in comparison to earlier views—Rousseau's social man, for instance—is total and absolute. While for Rousseau man could become authentic and so overcome otherness through being shown by other people how to correctly orientate oneself to the behaviour of the group and through this to nature itself, with Gobineau man's scope of action is narrowed to absolutely nil; racial man is the mere implement of a transcendental that he cannot influence in any way and that in no way depends on him. This is clear and undeniable, and again, occurred as a response to the problem of the group as unaffected by the social conditioning, which necessitated a theory of the group capable of raising it above society and so explaining it.⁵⁵⁰ With Gobineau, then, we come full circle from Augustine. Free will is finally destroyed even though much of what went along with it as inherited from Augustine remains. Free will inevitably defeats itself; it becomes the mere prisoner of what man already is, because of the barrier that it places between man and the ability to appreciate otherness, since the man guided by a belief in his own free will simply sees himself as constituting the world through volition rather than as participating with it via working with otherness.

Gobineau was unwilling to accept Tocqueville's accusation that his ideas implicitly eliminated free will even though in many instances within the work he directly states that agency can have no impact on the founding, course, or outcome of a civilization. As he writes in a line that with a few modifications could undeniably just as easily have come from the *German Ideology*, "the existence of a society is, in the original instance, an effect which does not depend on man's generation or intransigence, it does not entail any results for which he is responsible. It is not then moral. A society is not, in itself, either virtuous or vicious; it is not wise or foolish; it is. It is not the action of a man, it is not the determination of a people, that prepares the event that establishes (society)... It is not the will of a monarch or those of his subjects which modifies the essence of a society; it is, under identical laws, (always) the result of ethnic mixture" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 331). Or again, where Gobineau writes that race mixture "imposes a population's mode of existence... It dictates the elements of its laws; it inspires its wishes, its

⁵⁵⁰ As Barzun writes of race and class theory, their dependence on equating human behaviour to natural forces compelled them to dismiss factors associated with conscious purpose as beneath consideration, all these "were explained away as illusions... The blind play of forces known as struggle replaced purpose. The vast arena of nature was pictured as a scene of 'desperate' conflict" (Barzun 1981: 322).

projects, its loves, it inflames its hatreds, it governs its contempt" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 332). Using arguments familiar to our own time, Tocqueville critiques Gobineau's theory for its "complete abolition, of human liberty" against which, on account of its pernicious consequences, he is "opposed in the extreme" (Tocqueville 1959: 227). Tocqueville humorously writes that the apparent resignation to the status quo implicit in Gobineau's ideas would leave him "no choice but either to pull the covers over myself and wait for the announced end or... sample all the possible pleasures before this" (Tocqueville 1959: 292). Gobineau's theory would thereby render itself essentially pointless at the same time that it would elevate as an absolute an inescapable fatalism as being the only truth available to human beings, a malaise or "spiritual lassitude" because men can be nothing other than what they already are (Tocqueville 1959: 233). Such a theory would also implicitly only serve to state the obvious and so would be tautological; nothing could be done with it or learned from it by its very nature. Nor could the theory be criticized since it claims to be able to explain everything, even its critiques. It is revealing also that Gobineau is apparently so confident in his own ideas that he at no point seems to consider what the effect would be on human behaviour if racialism were to prove false.⁵⁵¹

Gobineau's study of history is so deterministic that it is ultimately indistinguishable from resignation to the status quo. As Biddiss points out, Gobineau's "framework surely annihilates any practical usefulness that might be derived from such instruction—or indeed from education in general" (Biddiss 1970: 134). And history cannot be used positively to change the present, according to Gobineau, for the simple fact that it is indistinguishable from the present. This is a theory of total continuity. As we saw, in his desire to respond to the problem of group division within society Gobineau had to revert to a "scientific" naturalism that seemed to exist *a priori* of individual or social influence. Gobineau's emphasis on the material, understanding man's embodied nature for the first time, the physiology of one's own body, meant that for him the relation to nature was not to be surpassed but only used in tandem with the dictates of nature, the emphasis here is not on ascending to some higher metaphysical plain or on even establishing a moral order *per se*, but on living empirically as men ought to, in tandem with the nature of race and how it defines man. History thereby becomes wedded to a naturalism that must operate

⁵⁵¹ As Tocqueville writes, "what purpose does it serve to persuade lesser peoples... that, such being their racial nature, they can do nothing to better themselves? Don't you see how inherent in your doctrine are all the evils produced by permanent inequality: pride, violence, the scorn of one's fellow men, tyranny and abjection in every one of their forms?" (Tocqueville 1959: 229).

strictly behind men's backs, as it becomes the expression of a solution to the contemporary problem of group conflict.⁵⁵²

Nevertheless, for all his professed objectivism Gobineau's own use of history was highly creative and quite obviously subjective. Gobineau like Rousseau was someone who in Barzun's words "felt born out of his time" (Barzun 1965: 53). It seemed to him as if the modern world was a place without meaningful options. And so Gobineau had a tendency to idolize or imagine himself as someone living in the past, whether with the Germanic conquerors of Rome or with the Norseman of the Early Middle Ages, times at which there was still room for human greatness because the world was less afflicted by miscegenation and so mediocrity.⁵⁵³ As mentioned, Gobineau's belief that racial composition completely constituted the individual in every respect also brought the whole of history into the self and so acted as a sort of guarantee of what he considered to be a genuine human individuality (Arendt 1958: 175). As with all the other figures Gobineau was a man in search of an authentic self, because he felt that it was this that was lacking in his own time and in his own individual experience. And like the other figures again, Gobineau found the origin of inauthenticity in history because he located it in a primal error. And in this, like Rousseau, he would look for answers to the problems that plague human life by returning "to the virgin forests and peoples of the woods" (Seillière 1903: XXXIX). Gobineau's attempt, as mentioned near the beginning of this chapter, to genealogically link himself to the Viking Ottar Jarl, to establish an identity for himself by tracing the origins of his own physiology, i.e. his race (Boissel 1993: 29), in this sense perhaps bears more than a passing resemblance to both the *Confessions* of Augustine and of Rousseau as well as to the *Secretum* of Petrarch.

Augustine's total reconciliation rendered even aberrations, that which failed to live up to man's nature, ultimately part of God's plan, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that for

⁵⁵² And in tandem with this he envisioned his own ideas as uniquely a product of the modern world, because of the abundance of "positive facts," as Gobineau phrases it, that it had made available to the researcher for the first time (Gobineau 1999: XI).

⁵⁵³ "In their respective ways both Gobineau and Rousseau were convinced that man had fallen from his primordial high estate, but while both writers were dissatisfied with their respective epochs and given to idealizing earlier ages, the styles of these two men, equally in revolt, were very different. An immense distances necessarily separated Rousseau with his plebeian philosophy and tranquil ideal from such an aristocrat as Count de Gobineau whose chief quarrel with the modern spirit was its lack of ardour. Rousseau had rebelled against the abuses of the 'ancien régime' and the artificiality of eighteenth Century society. The principal objects of our author's attack were eighteenth Century rationalism with its sequel the levelling-trend and modern scepticism and intellectual dilettantism" (Spring 1995: 231).

Gobineau even those who perform the actions of race sincerely and faithfully are themselves rendered nothing. For all his talk about the freedom, energy, and superior morality of the Aryan, Gobineau's theory, by his own admission, as we just saw, is clearly amoral, it leaves no room for reflection or deliberation, for questions about how one ought to behave in the world by the members of the White race or by anyone else, because its subject is so completely impelled by natural laws (Todorov 1993: 125). For Gobineau it could perhaps be said that each race does possess a sort of essence or vitality, a sort of racial will, and that the role of this is roughly analogous to the role that the will plays in the other systems in taking man above the mundane and connecting him to his true nature. But this is not an individual will, if any fault resides in history in Gobineau's system, anything that perhaps comes closest to the exercise of a free will and so moral consideration, it is, paradoxically, only that of the Aryan for giving into the inevitable natural temptation for racial miscegenation and as such failing to treat the other human varieties, as Seillière phrases it, "more fully as beasts of burden" (Seillière 1903: 444). Gobineau, perhaps, was unable to accept the absolutely deterministic, and so nihilistic, implications of his own theory, and it would be left to his successors, who possessed no such reservations, to bring his ideas to their fullest and most vulgar expression in the totalitarian systems of the twentieth century.

Thus, even though for Gobineau the Aryans were the spark of genius responsible for what makes men different from nature, even they were nonetheless prisoners of natural forces, just as any other creature in existence, paradoxically even when behaving in a fashion that was apparently non-natural or qualitatively different from nature (Roberts 2008: 18). It can rightly be said in this sense that for Gobineau there was no individual at all, unlike for Rousseau, but merely a composite self that was the product of the interaction between racial forces beyond or *a priori* of the self in history. For Gobineau, in the form of race theory, nature as "the body is dominant over the spirit of man" (Biddiss 1970: 99).⁵⁵⁴ And thus Gobineau's diminished view of man is reflected in the role that he envisions him as playing in nature itself. For Rousseau man was the only creature able to comprehend the order of existence and so achieve a sort of harmony with nature by virtue of his capacity to realize the correspondence between it and his

⁵⁵⁴ This is why Gobineau claims credit in the foreword to the second edition of the Essay published posthumously in 1882, perhaps at first sight strangely, for Darwinism. He argues, in a way that few in his time took seriously, that the theory of evolution was one of the "main offshoots from my initial ideas" because the application of natural selection in the form of "ethnic intermixture" to human behaviour and so society itself was first discovered in the Essay (Gobineau 1970: 232).

will and soul. Gobineau, by contrast, in tandem with perceiving no substantive difference between man and nature, argues that the most that man can hope to take from nature is an understanding of its material operation.

As he writes, "our success may lead us to explore all the secrets of the material world.... but even when the victory is ours, shall we have advanced a single step beyond the bare affirmation of physical laws?... All this does not lead us to infinity. Even if we had counted all the planetary systems that move through space, should we be any nearer? Have we learnt a single thing about the great mysteries that was unknown to the ancients? We have, merely, so far as I can see, changed the previous methods of circling the cave where the secret lies. We have not pierced into the darkness one inch further" (Gobineau 1999: 156).

This obviously constitutes a less ambitious program of human endeavour, a lowering of expectations, a sameness, a more mundane perspective on what man can hope to achieve.⁵⁵⁵ For Rousseau man could connect with nature uniquely by virtue of his manhood, while for Gobineau man's only connection with it is through a materiality that in no way distinguishes him from the animals. For Gobineau the relation to nature can never be surpassed but can at best only be used appropriately, but even in this he claims that the man of one age can never hope to reclaim the cultural achievements of another, such as, for instance, the building techniques of the ancient world, because "while tilling our new field, we have not been able to keep fertile the lands already cultivated" (Gobineau 1999: 157). In other words, an ever-changing racial composition means that past cultural practices produced by racial miscegenation are irretrievably lost with the passing of that mixture to the ages. The complete identification of culture with race mixture makes these discoveries incommunicable. And, consequently, since man cannot even hope to possess all of the cultural knowledge produced by human beings, being the prisoner of a sort of racial ontology, how could he ever hope to unlock all the secrets of nature arrived at by virtue of his culture? As he writes again, man could at the very most have hoped to know "what he had power to know... and having gained tranquility after all his struggles, he might find his ultimate rest, if not in a state of absolute perfection, at any rate in the midst of joy and abundance." But

⁵⁵⁵ It is interesting to note in this light, though, that Gobineau appears to see no contradiction here between the limitations that he identifies with man's knowledge and his own claim conversely to have arrived at, like the other figures, a total understanding of man himself via race and through this of all the evils that befall him.

"such happiness with all its limitations, is not even possible for us, since man unlearns as fast as he learns; he cannot gain intellectually and morally without losing physically, and he does not hold any of his conquests strongly enough to be certain of keeping them always" (Gobineau 1999: 164).

This is why Gobineau calls man "the bad animal par excellence" (Gobineau 1855: Vol. 4, 35). Man is doomed to imperfection and to destroy himself. He is the bleak prisoner of his own self-destructive tendencies and of the ignorance and physical and social degeneration that results from them. As in his allusion to *The Republic* above, he is perhaps a creature like Plato's allegory of the prisoner in the cave who can at times catch a glimpse of better or higher things but, by virtue of his naturalness, is nevertheless cursed to forever be incapable of reaching them since "mankind never goes beyond itself" (Gobineau 1999: 167). Gobineau even argues, as would Nietzsche later, that man's knowledge and self-consciousness in fact constitutes an evolutionary Achilles heel and that for this reason it may have been better for man to remain in the immediacy and stability of the animal's existence in nature since they "know what is useful to them, and we do not... our horizon is wider than theirs, but, like theirs, it is still cramped and bounded" (Gobineau 1999: 162). And with such a perspective on human life, nature itself, as far as man is concerned, can equally be envisioned in no other way than as a raw materialism. We can see here, as with the other figures, that man's view of what nature is mirrors what man takes himself to be as his restriction forecloses the possibility of participating with nature in new ways via the creative space that engagement with otherness provides. And by the same token, that which is irredeemably beyond man—the divine, the metaphysical—emerges as absolute otherness, or conversely as simply non-existent, as man's view of his own potentiality becomes more mundane. All this perhaps demonstrates that Gobineau realized the quite negative and destructive implications of his own materialism, as would become all too evident to a later age, and that in his pessimism he displays an honesty perhaps not displayed by those who put forth similar theories but were unable to resist infusing them with optimistic conclusions.

Summary

Not surprisingly, Gobineau's incredible nihilism proved very unpopular. People generally do not want to hear that they lack control over their own lives and that their existence

is meaningless. The racial theory itself, putting aside its conclusions, was also out of step with the liberal atmosphere of mid-nineteenth century France. Gobineau evidently believed that the *Essay* would make a sensational impact on the French intelligentsia and guarantee him a place in the Academy, something he greatly coveted but was never able to obtain. But it was not the active opposition to his ideas so much as the public's general disinterest in them that perhaps disappointed him the most. As he writes almost pleadingly to Tocqueville in 1856, fully two years after the publication of the *Essay*'s last two volumes, "knowing that you do not approve of it, it would be very bad form if I were to ask that you defend my book, but this is not at all what I want; what I want is that my thesis be discussed and that I be given an opportunity to demonstrate that I am right" (Gobineau 1959: 289). In the first place, the *Essay* attracted scorn because it was based on little more than Gobineau's own musings about the origins of group conflict.⁵⁵⁶ Gobineau's disdain for the Roman Empire also ran against contemporary enthusiasm for empire-building in the Roman mold, and his apparent denial of the "civilizing" power of Christianity was diametrically opposed to a core justification for European imperialism (Spring 1995: 26). In the same vein, his ideas, as being highly critical of any mixing of peoples, were so contrary to European expansionism that it is little surprise that, when they were discussed, they were portrayed as the fringe ravings of a man who without doubt was slightly deranged. Gobineau lived in a time, then, that seemed to be moving away from his ideas (Snyder 1966: 49). And Gobineau interpreted all this through the lens of his own theory. He took the *Essay*'s reception as just a further substantiation of his thesis, that Frenchmen were unable to understand his ideas because the intellectual climate of his day had been so degraded by racial miscegenation.

Gobineau would spend the remainder of his life in relative obscurity living throughout the world in the diplomatic service of France in Persia, Newfoundland, Brazil, Greece, and Sweden. His experience of life beyond Europe tended to reaffirm the views on race expressed in the *Essay* (Gobineau 1970: 28). Yet in spite of his great prejudice, wherever he went he developed—contrary to many Europeans of his time—a genuine interest and affinity for the people he encountered, exhibiting, as Todorov writes, "a degree of broadmindedness difficult to

⁵⁵⁶ As mentioned for all its sweeping claims at the time of the writing of the *Essay*, Gobineau had practically no firsthand experience of non-European culture or of the Black and Yellow races that he so disparaged.

reconcile with his racialist reputation" (Todorov 1993: 129).⁵⁵⁷ After his forced retirement from the diplomatic service in 1877 owing to his acerbic personality and constant disagreements with his superiors (Boissel 1993: 304), Gobineau lived in exile in Italy where he spent the last several years of his life studying sculpture in Rome with his companion the Comtesse de La Tour, his marriage having collapsed after the Franco-Prussian War wiped out much of his wealth. Gobineau died alone in a hotel room in Turin on October 13, 1882, after suffering a heart attack in a trolley car earlier in the day (Lukacs 1959: 180). When he died, as Spring writes, "he was almost unknown" (Spring 1995: 246). On his deathbed he must have felt, perhaps as Marx himself did, that he had not lived up to his potential, that his life had been a waste or failure, a string of false starts and disappointments.

But just as would be the case for Marx, it did not take long after Gobineau's death for his reputation and an interest in his ideas to begin to take off. Much of this owed to Gobineau's late-in-life friendship with Richard Wagner. The two had first met in Rome in 1876 at the behest of a mutual friend, but had only become close in 1880 after a reencounter in Venice (Eugène 2000: 4).⁵⁵⁸ Wagner immediately set himself to intensively studying Gobineau's body of work and in 1881 invited Gobineau to Bayreuth for five weeks as his honoured guest. He also wrote an article in his newspaper the *Bayreuther Blätter* endorsing the Essay's racial views (Eugène 2000: 8).⁵⁵⁹ The incredibly self-obsessed Wagner was even said to have described Gobineau, owing to his racialism and the scope of his vision, as "my only true contemporary" (Herman 2007: 68). Gobineau no doubt found deep satisfaction in the belated recognition of his genius by a man as famous as Wagner and apparently made busts of the valkyries and declared the Ring to be the artistic embodiment of the Essay (Barzun 1981: 279).

With his disdain for the racial composition of Germany, Gobineau evidently pictured their relationship, as he wrote in the inscription of the collected works that he presented to Wagner, not as one between a Frenchman and a German, but between a Norman and a Saxon

⁵⁵⁷ While in Persia, for instance, Gobineau learned Farsi and earnestly studied that nation's culture and religion acquiring a great familiarity with Shia Islam, which culminated in his writing several books based on his experiences (Nash and O'Donoghue 2008: 1-3).

⁵⁵⁸ Gobineau, a great conversationalist, had apparently prepared for the meeting, and Wagner, by this time completely surrounded by the toadies and flatterers of the little world that he had created for himself at Bayreuth, although naturally knowing "nothing of the existence and the work of Gobineau," was intrigued by his systematic presentation of race theory and by his extraordinary independence of mind (Eugène 1998: 3).

⁵⁵⁹ As Stein writes of the relationship between the two men, "each found in the other some degree of confirmation: Wagner, a 'scientific' assurance for his own tentative expressions on race and 'blood;' Gobineau, a corroboration of his belief in the superiority of the German race in the heroes and Gods of 'The Ring'" (Stein 1950: 36).

(Eugène 1998: 4). But in the hands of the Wagnerites all such defamatory references to modern Germany and to the final extinction of the Aryans as a separate race in the fifth century, along with Gobineau's complimentary statements about Jews, he admired their resistance to assimilation,⁵⁶⁰ his views on the origin of art as produced by race mixture, and the intellectual and artistic superiority of non-European cultures, would be sanitized or explained away.⁵⁶¹ Spurred on by Wagner's disciples, the Essay found a receptive audience in a recently united Germany brimming with confidence and in search of an identity.⁵⁶² Large segments of German society would thereafter come to incorrectly identify themselves with the ancient Germanic-Aryans that Gobineau praised so highly and take the Essay as a validation of Germany's "right to world leadership" (Snyder 1966: 49). In a short period of time, then, Gobineau's highly aristocratic ideas and hatred of nationalism would be transformed into the glorification of a single nation and of all its people. Gobineau's international aristocracy would become the Teutonic race as embodied in the modern German nation, and every German would become an aristocrat in his own mind, with the inhabitants of all the other nations now taking on the role of the rabble or lower orders (Barzun 1965: 178).⁵⁶³

The individual who most contributed to this change was Wagner's son-in-law, the infamous Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a man like Gobineau who was in search of an identity. He was a transplanted Englishman who had spent his early life in France. The sickly and artistic son of an admiral, he found in the doctrine of Aryanism a safe harbour in a chaotic and unsatisfying world (Field 1981: 19-27. And it is perhaps the supreme irony of German racialism that neither of its two most important figures were in fact themselves German (Stein 1950: 150). In his *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* Chamberlain largely copied Gobineau's discussion in the Essay of the rejuvenation of Rome by the Germanic tribes, the thesis that it did not fall but was saved by the conserving power of the Aryan race. He argued that the foundations of modern

⁵⁶⁰ Gobineau "had never been an anti-Semite" (Buenzod 1967: 458).

⁵⁶¹ "Gobineau did not believe in any way that the Germans were a superior people. Germany was for him a grouping of Slavs, Celts, and some Germans" (Eugène 2000: 10).

⁵⁶² Gobineau's popularity was such that in 1894, a Gobineau Society devoted to studying his ideas was founded in Strasbourg, with Cosima Wagner as the first inscribed member. This was followed in 1906 when six thousand volumes on race theory along with Gobineau's original manuscripts were brought together at the University of Strasbourg to form the nucleus of the Gobineau Library (Lukacs 1959: 183). In 1913 Ludwig Schemann, a notoriously anti-Semitic Professor at the University of Strasbourg who was responsible for assembling the collection just mentioned, also published a biography of Gobineau that was very successful.

⁵⁶³ Yet Gobineau is not blameless because he "is perhaps the man who has contributed the most powerfully, in modern times, to exalting racial conscience" (Buenzod 1967: 459).

European supremacy were laid by the Aryan conquerors of Rome. In Chamberlain's hands the theory of race struggle was transformed into the epic battle for mastery of civilization between the two racial groups that, in his mind, had remained the most homogeneous, on the one hand, the Jews and, on the other, the Teutons (Boissel 1993: 13).⁵⁶⁴ Chamberlain generously considers the term Aryan to apply to most Western Europeans, while the Teutons, the leaders of the Aryan or White race as a whole, he takes as applying only to the Germans.⁵⁶⁵ In Chamberlain's *Foundations* Gobineau's pessimistic ideas would acquire "a happy ending" through deemphasizing the notion that the decline of blood purity was an intrinsic feature of civilization (Herman 2007: 70). For Chamberlain the blood purity of the Aryan became attached to a sort of collective consciousness or *gestalt* tied not to class but to appearance which could be maintained continually through eugenics, by the conquest of inferior peoples via the race struggle, or through engagement with Aryan culture (Herman 2007: 74). And in this way Gobineau's nihilistic ideas about the inevitable disappearance of the Aryans and the end of civilization were transformed into a "battle hymn of Nordic-Teutonic racial supremacy" (Snyder 1966: 50-51). For Chamberlain the Aryan race was not something subject to inevitable degeneration but would instead purify itself over time like the blossoming of fruit on a tree (Buenzod 1967: 455).

In the *Foundations* Chamberlain actually uses Augustine's ideas and ethnic background as one of his principle examples of the racial anarchy that befell the Roman Empire in its last years and from which it was delivered through the Germanic conquest. While acknowledging Augustine's undeniable eloquence and "religious genius" (Chamberlain 1911: Vol. 2, 76), Chamberlain nevertheless insists that there was "a hopeless chaos in the brain of this eminent man" because in his writings can be detected the syncretic combination of many forms of belief, incompatible because derived from so many ethnic backgrounds: "the Jewish belief in Jehovah, the mythology of Greece, Alexandrine Neo-Platonism, Romish priestcraft, the Pauline conception of God, and the contemplation of the Crucified Lord, all jumbled together in heterogeneous confusion" (Chamberlain 1911: Vol. 1, 311). The contradictions of Augustine's theology, the combination of the most profound insights into the human soul with the basest superstition, such as his fixation on the Garden of Eden and the existence of demons, is

⁵⁶⁴ In this he was apparently copying an earlier adaption of Gobineau's racial theory to the particularities of German anti-Semitism in the writings of Wilhelm Marr (Evans 2005: 27-28).

⁵⁶⁵ Chamberlain argued, as Gobineau had earlier, that everything great in human achievement stemmed from the actions of the Aryan race, but in the *Foundations* the cause of everything negative becomes the pernicious actions and influence of the Jews and to a lesser extent of the non-White races (Snyder 1966: 52).

emblematic of the failure of the Classical world, Chamberlain claims, as owing to its cosmopolitan tendencies. Augustine's writings sway "to and fro like a pendulum... cut off from all racial belongings," he is a "mongrel among mongrels" the wide assortment of blood flowing in his veins makes him as bewildered as "a hapless ant, carried and set down ten miles from its own nest" (Chamberlain 1911: Vol. 1, 320). Augustine in Chamberlain's racialism now becomes that "African half-breed" (Chamberlain 1911: Vol. 1, 557), the father of a Roman Catholic theology of Semitic intolerance and slavery to abstraction set against the freedom of Aryan religious belief as only realized in the Reformation of Martin Luther (Chamberlain Vol. 2, 80-81).

Augustine's life, like "the raceless and nationless chaos of the late Roman Empire," is "a sin against nature," lacking existence because he is not "a member of a specific race" (Chamberlain Vol. 1, 320). In the face of this "chaos" Chamberlain maintains that Augustine, in his impotence and great confusion, was finally forced to admit defeat at the hands of the mass of inconsistencies diffused throughout his mind. By necessity Augustine, lest his experience be endured by others, sacrificed his own religious search with a "look of pain" raised to God "from amid the ruins" of a floundering Rome, and thereafter devoted himself wholeheartedly to building up a monolithic Christian doctrine (Chamberlain 1911: Vol. 2, 54). And even though its "architecture should be very rude in comparison with the aspirations of the profound spirit," Augustine seized on the doctrine of original sin and free will, man as the cause of his own misery and capable only through total obedience of deliverance from an error that infected the entire world. This was so that it could serve as a sure foundation of faith and salvation in a failing world, so that a "poor, chaotic humanity may yet get something sure to cling to" (Chamberlain 1911: Vol. 2, 54). Chamberlain, clearly oblivious to the similarities in motive, form, and content between his own race theory and Augustine's solution to otherness, not recognizing the parallels between himself and Augustine, argues, then, that his theology was the product of "a kind of mad despair" developed in response to "the powers of the Chaos, from which he himself had arisen" (Chamberlain 1911: Vol. 2, 72).

It is revealing, when compared to the lacklustre reception of the Essay some 50 years earlier, that the *Foundations*, on its initial publication in 1899 and then in translation into all the principle European languages, proved wildly popular throughout the Western world (Field 1981:

225).⁵⁶⁶ Though in many places a work of massive erudition, to the modern reader the *Foundations* is so dripping with anti-Semitic venom, so full of blind vitriol, that it is difficult to read even a few pages of it. Yet in 1911 in his review of the first English translation of the *Foundations* even George Bernard Shaw, like many others, famously applauded not just the immense scholarship of the book but also its findings on the importance of race, writing that "whoever has not read it will be rather out of it in political and sociological discussions for some time to come" (Shaw 1996: Vol. 2, 262). Chamberlain's popularity outside Germany waned considerably after the First World War; he was viewed as a traitor and treated as a pariah by his native land. Yet shortly before his death in 1927 he would make the acquaintance and strongly endorse the political program of Adolf Hitler who, along with much of the Nazi leadership, would attend Chamberlain's funeral (Field 1981: 444). During the Third Reich, Chamberlain and Gobineau, through their influence on Alfred Rosenberg and through him on the writer of *Mein Kampf* himself (Evans 2005: 178; Snyder 1966: 53), would together serve as "the twin pillars of the new 'scientific' structure of the Third Reich" with immense academic resources devoted to investigating and substantiating their ideas (Stein 1950: 143). Gobineau's Essay would appear in excerpted form in the textbooks of German school children and his theory of miscegenation and blood purity would serve as the basis for the race laws. For the Nazi regime Gobineau would take on the ideological importance perhaps of a lesser Karl Marx, envisioned as a sort of prophet who, like a voice crying out in the wilderness, had been the first to discover the true nature of history and humanity.

⁵⁶⁶ Despite its immense size, totalling some 1200 pages in two volumes, its first edition sold 60 000 copies and was printed in eight additional editions in its first ten years, all this only in the German language (Snyder 1966: 51).

Conclusion

The introduction to this work drew on the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, most especially Theodor Adorno, to demonstrate the interdependence of subject and object. It was argued that the ontological nature of our thought cannot be explained without a subject. At the same time, it was also shown that this necessitates the existence of an otherness beyond human comprehension, Adorno's non-identical. Following Adorno I then argued that agency comes from the awareness of the limitations of one's conception of the world and more generally of the existence of an external world beyond human determinations. I proposed to look at instances in the past of individuals struggling to find what they took to be an authentic subjectivity and, intertwined with this, a means of coming to terms with otherness. At the same time I proposed to show by way of these examples—the point of origin for what I took to be ideologies that sought to eliminate the place for the subject. My intention was to show the genesis of the Western expectation that otherness was something ephemeral, or illusory, something that could be definitively overcome. By virtue of the interdependence of subject and object, and in turn of agency as a product of the recognition of the non-identical, I argued that it was by tracing this moment and its implications that one could also find the starting point for, and thus have a better understanding of, contemporary attempts to eliminate, or constrain, the subject.

Following the introduction, the work proceeded to a discussion of the life and thought of Saint Augustine. His formative years were characterized by his striving for permanency and for a solution to the contradictions and seeming meaninglessness of human existence, by a search for a reliable connection to something certain and true. The chapter showed that his search for a path to the transcendent, as motivated by the upheaval and immense sense of insecurity that prevailed in his own time, led him to the realization that the only sure and unassailable path to a certainty presumed to be beyond human experience could be found in locating the cause of its absence in the actions of man himself rather than as actually solvable through man's agency. Augustine extended his own sense of intellectual and spiritual inadequacy to mankind as a whole. At the same time he made the total surrender to God that this failure necessitated the very route to the certainty that he so vehemently desired. And thus Augustine entertained the most ambitious of hopes about man's destiny, believing that through the overcoming of man's primordial error, through man's conformity to a certain way of being, man was fated to make an

absolute reconciliation with all of reality, essentially incorporating the objective world into himself through becoming a part of God. In this way Augustine combined the notion that there is a need for man's absolute submission to a system with the idea that this system can offer total deliverance by, paradoxically, actually eliminating his activity. As we saw, vital for this notion was Augustine's monumental development of the idea of the will, of man as possessing a singular connection to the divinity which cast him above nature, as well as his very different conception of time and epistemology. Man thereafter, through the aberration of original sin, became the cause of all that exceeded him in the world and in his own state of internal confusion. Yet at the same time existence by virtue of this could now be taken by Augustine and his successors not to be inherently imperfect; rather, imperfection itself—otherness or the non-identical—was henceforth believed to have literally arose from man's inability to correctly understand himself. True humility to the unknowability that is life gave way to obedience to a human construct.

In the subsequent chapter we turned to Petrarch, the father of the Renaissance. The direct impetus for his idealistic discovery of the "self" was the spiritual and intellectual chaos that had followed the demise of the Augustinian reconciliation that had dominated European life for nearly a thousand years. Augustine's God, when taken to its furthest implication, was show to be a divinity who lacked true omnipotence, the *sine qua non* of Christian theology. God's omnipotence could only be upheld at the price of a relativism that separated Him from man, thus eliminating man's connection to the divine yet at the same time rendering him a free agent. Petrarch, drawing on his own inner struggle and self-perception of worthlessness, seized on the problem of man's dynamism and made it the basis of his own reconciliation with God. Man's creation in the "image of God," for Petrarch, set him above reality, in a sense, by giving him an inner worth capable of solving his own problems not through scholastic appeals to authority or through subordination, but through activity and the triumph of a wilful individuality capable of paralleling God's own creativity and hence bringing man to salvation. Petrarch did not simply seek to find a sage-like self-containment in the ancient mode, but an image of salvation that held the promise, ambition, and expectation of solving otherness by positing that by his very nature man was capable of connecting to all that was real in existence, the eternal. By looking back to the ancients and reading Augustine in a way different from his contemporaries, he found something godlike and redeeming in his own individuality, in what he took to be man's agency.

He felt that men in his own time could take up where Classical antiquity had left off, with the end of the Roman Empire and what he regarded as the triumph of philistinism, and again become sub-creators of reality under God through exercising the slice of the divine within themselves. Petrarch, like Augustine, thought that man's existence was ultimately redeemable through his conformity to a standard in line with his inherent "nature." This was by virtue of existentially struggling against a nature now seen, in the aftermath of the demise of the Augustinian reconciliation, to be chaotic and unknowable. His incredible valorization of selfhood and personal development, as the path to God, his whole attitude toward knowledge and human endeavour, became the humanist movement that would be the impetus for the Renaissance that would dominate European intellectual life for several hundred years.

The next figure that this project examined was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was argued that the *philosophes* and the humanist movement shared many similarities in their view on agency and emphasis on a free and unencumbered subjectivity. In the eighteenth century this idealist approach to human behaviour had resulted in an inability to account for the undeniable influence of the social, as resulting from population growth, an increasing recognition of cultural variability across the globe, and the power of the absolutist monarchies. Rousseau felt, perhaps more acutely than any of his contemporaries, a sense of victimization at the hands of the individualism that Petrarch's emphasis on the self had engendered. Building on his own experiences, he looked back to the past, to the origin of society itself, to trace the beginning of everything that he believed was wrong with or contradictory in human life. Rousseau reacted to the problematic of the social by claiming that it was social forces, rather than an illusory individualism, that was really at the root of everything that could be defined as human. As reviewed, he had the same expectations about solving otherness as the other figures. For him too man was both meant for something better and the cause of his own problems. The solution to otherness was, for him, a sort of passivity, for man to conform to the order of nature, to identify it with his own subjectivity, through associating his inner capacities, his will and natural pity, with the harmony of reality itself. And it was only in man's approach to society, i.e. man's relationship to his fellows, that Rousseau found both an explanation for otherness—man's separation from himself, from nature, and from other men—and a possible means of resolving all its difficulties.

The last and perhaps most controversial figure reviewed was Joseph Arthur de Gobineau. His life and thought were largely formed in reaction to the problem of group conflict above the level of the social, which the failures of the French Revolution, inspired by Rousseau's image of man, had put into stark relief. To explain the political chaos of his own time, as well as his immense sense of disillusionment with his contemporaries, Gobineau resorted to a naturalistic explanation of man. He argued that the key to understanding human activity resided in a racial characteristic that functioned in a way akin to the natural forces of magnetism and gravitation. For Gobineau man and nature were completely synonymous in that an individual's traits and potential were entirely a reflection of their racial composition. All social and political problems and the limitations of man's science resulted, in Gobineau's mind, from a failure to understand the importance of race. Gobineau too believed that he had found the key to the non-identical, but for him, as we saw, the lack of agency actually possessed by man rendered his discoveries essentially pointless or moot. Humanity was inevitably doomed to self-destruction. While Rousseau's view of man was of a being uniquely able to conform to a godlike nature, Gobineau's perspective was that man was effectively indistinguishable from nature and, that nature was so passive that natural forces could not even influence him outside the effects of the transcendental and completely binding characteristic of race.

Commentary

This work was not meant to set forth a definitive portrait of thought in the West since Augustine, but was instead intended only to examine or illustrate the implications of a tendency, perhaps a dominant one, toward placing absolute faith in a system or abstraction that seems to hold the promise of explanation or salvation. The writings and motivations of the figures examined in this work could not be more distinct, yet a fateful symmetry in their expectation and approach to existence knits them together into a continuum of thought whose consistency and direction is undeniable. In writing these chapters, I have endeavoured to present their lives and ideas, as the figures themselves might have done, as a means of emphasizing the enormous differences between them. And as this work has shown, for all their differences they reflected each other's positions or failings and so can be taken as a piece. In this light, I contend that they ensured the maintenance or influence of a certain direction and approach to man and to the

external world. Augustine's fundamental idea of man's own responsibility for what he does not know was carried over through the responses adopted to the "human problem" that his ideas necessitated. This is because Augustine's monolithic conception of human nature limited man's ability to appreciate and work with otherness and at the same time created an expectation that human understanding should ultimately be error free. Every element of his theory was aimed at attributing blame for otherness to man, and so eliminating his agency in favour of obedience to a God who had all the answers.

The figures that I presented were not so much the creators of some completely new approach to life but were rather emblematic of creative attempts in their time, for good or ill, to accommodate otherness, or non-identity, in order to deal with reality's challenges. The approach to externality championed by Augustine relied on conforming man to a certain standard and on limiting his ability to engage with otherness. It presumed that it was within man's capacity to find certainty, that his failure to do so stemmed from his inability to realize what he himself was, and that a system of thought should ultimately not have problems. The attempt to remedy man of his misery through putting faith in a system that promises salvation is obviously always circumstantial, its content is always a product of the ontology in which it occurs. But the approach to it adopted by the figures in this work—the form that the response to these circumstances took—was based on, and reinforced by, presuppositions about the need for certainty and the means of achieving it through confining man's actions within the expectations of a certain mode of being. There is a distinct complex of ideas implied in the notion that man caused otherness and that it can be solved through his actions. These ideas place an emphasis on problem solving, on explanatory power, and on perfection as being the end goal and expectation of human endeavour. They seek the "key," presumed to exist, for unlocking the mystery of life and, above all, emphasize that man can know reality only through knowing himself, his nature, that solving man or the "human problem" is the means through which everything else can be known. For all the figures the cause and solution to otherness were thus synonymous, the way out for man was to find the cause and from this the solution, but this presupposes, and so reveals their expectation, that solutions are inherently within man's capacity, if only he can find himself.

All of this was novel in Augustine's own time, Classical culture viewed otherness as intrinsic to human existence rather than as caused by man and so as solvable or redeemable. His contemporaries viewed the material world as inherently imperfect; reality was a harmonious and

eternal organism. They emphasized transcendence rather than reconciliation, self-containment in order to cope with a degraded world rather than the promise of its inevitable perfection. For them any path to God had to be individualized. But, Augustine realized that the Christian belief in a plan for history, when combined with God's omniscience, meant that error could not be inherent in the world, definitively breaking from the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition. He also realized that this necessitated that man's experience of error could, because of the goodness of the world, only be attributable to man himself, rather than to God and his Creation. This provided the promise of sure deliverance, that history is the working out of an inevitable error, the revealing of man's true nature which can only lead to perfection. This allowed him to create a theology which was truly total in scope and conception, one that could sanction only one path to God, since the whole of non-identity was now seen as residing in a common cause. At the same time it absorbed everything in existence into man's struggle to meet God. For the whole point of God's creation, since man alone could do evil and so alone was created to one day be perfected, as God must have known prior to the creation, was to serve as a means for man to come to God.

Through the formative thousand year influence of the Church doctrine that Augustine's theology created, his way of looking at the world become a commonplace of Western thinking. In a way, this work could be seen first and foremost as an examination of the ongoing appearance of the concept of original sin which he originated. The notion of obedience—to the self, the social, or the racial—remained but not for the reasons that Augustine would have expected. Obedience is implicit in this approach to life even where it remains unrecognized or covert. It is not so much that each of the figures overtly adopted the idea that man was responsible for non-identity and so had to be restricted, as was the case for Augustine; rather this was implied in the approach to the problems with which they were presented. All of the figures equated means and ends, arguing that the world could only be used legitimately as an end to each of their own respective solutions to otherness. They similarly rendered means and ends as one in the same through putting forth transhistorical solutions to man's confrontation with what he does not know. The means became indistinguishable from the ends, since one factor alone was now envisioned as the driver of all human activity and thus as alone possessing any existence. All the figures saw man as more alive than nature, more real, by virtue of his intelligence or connection to the factor taken to govern reality. And all also used the same precise and

unmistakeable terms "nothing" and "nothingness," as denoting a lack of reality or worth, perhaps even suggesting the absence of a right to exist, to describe that which failed to conform to their ideal—their contemporaries, in other words, who were immersed in degradation. All the elements of Augustine's solution that necessitated obedience, because it was man himself that was the cause of otherness and so had to be marginalized, were carried over therefore, even if obedience itself was not, into succeeding approaches to otherness because of these presuppositions about man's nature and his capacity for acquiring definitive knowledge.

Essentially, the notion that man can discover a solution to reality's challenges via his own self presupposes conformity to a certain mode of being which is inherently exclusive and so eliminates alternatives and thereby agency. As stated in the introduction non-identity, or otherness, is not solvable by virtue of its centrality to human thought itself. Consequently, making solvability the standard of worth of human action has only served to drive man into the abyss by rooting thought in something doomed to an ever more restrictive self-destruction. A successive emphasis on solving otherness has led to a successive restriction of that on which man himself is based. Like two sides of the same coin Augustine's emphasis on obedience and man's restriction, became the central components of subsequent responses to that which seemed to be beyond human purview. Augustine's theology in this way performed a double and complementary movement. In revisiting the assumptions of his time, in realising that the Christian plan for history when combined with God's omnipotence necessitated man's own responsibility for non-identity, he created both an expectation of a problem-free state for man and at the same time restricted the scope of man's ability to envision alternatives to it, i.e. because of the exclusiveness of his solution. The novelty of this approach to non-identity thereby created a sort of super-nutritious rooting solution to foster the propagation and growth of later ideologies. The unique characteristics of Augustine's approach would ensure, and I maintain account for, the strength of ideologies in subsequent Western history, the belief that absolute certainty is achievable, and the corresponding restriction of man's agency that this entails.

And the inability to respond to the inevitable problems that arise from such an approach to otherness, because of its sidelining of man and consequent lack of flexibility, seems to have led to an omnipresent feeling of crisis in the Western mindset and to a consequent search for salvation through seeking refuge in ever more encompassing systems. These, in turn, have

provided temporary relief through their promise of deliverance until the emergence of yet another set of problems, with each escape merely deepening the pain of its absence and the inability to contend with them. The problems that arose in these successive systems of thought reflected, then, not so much what each had created so much as that with which they were unable to contend, because of the straitjackets that their predecessors had placed on human action and thought owing to their assumptions about what they ought to entail, i.e. that the problems associated with particular systems ought to be solvable. If the subject's agency depends on the ability to engage with otherness, as this work argues, then the problems of a contemporary order will reflect the restrictions placed on that subject by a prevailing system's solution to otherness. In seeking to respond to contemporary aporias by solving them, all the figures thus adopted these aporias, and by implication the place of the subject that they reflected, as the bases of their own theories. They approached their own contemporary problematics with the notion that offering solutions to them, i.e. a problem free solution, was the *sine qua non* of what men should be able to do. The problems were seen as problematic in themselves, and thereby as objectively solvable, rather than as resulting from the subject's incapacitation, that with which it was unable to deal with because of the level of agency allotted to it. As each sought to solve the aporias left by their predecessors they merely repeated the restricted view of what the subject was capable, since these were themselves, again, completely intertwined with, reflected, or the product of, the problem seeking to be solved. No doubt alternatives arose to the status quo that did not seek to restrict man, which did not try to "solve" the problems of their time in the way put forward by the figures examined above. But it is the pre-eminence of the problem-solving expectation in Western thought—that non-identity is an aberration, and its corresponding restriction of man's capacity for agency outside of the dictates of the systemic approach—that has made the kind of ideologies examined in this work dominant. Each propelled the restriction of the subject forward as each sought to respond to the aporias of their own time and thus got caught in Augustine's original restriction of man and its consequences.

Augustine's position that man could solve his problems because he had caused them, paradoxically, through his own restriction, was thus reified in the succeeding figures because each responded to the problem of their predecessors with a view to solving them, and so got co-opted into the failings of the subject which each of these problems reflected. Augustine's theology of total reconciliation could not deal with anything dynamic in the actions of either God

or man, thus Petrarch made human dynamism the basis of his own redemptive vision of humanity. Petrarch's emphasis on man's freedom of action in turn led to an inability to account for the influence of the social, and so Rousseau in response made social man the center of his own solution to the human problem. The influence that society exerts on the individual was in short order also shown to be unable to deal with the realities of group conflict within a given social formation itself. And consequently Gobineau reverted to naturalistic explanations of human action as tied to transcendentals, which themselves were taken to be constitutive of society and so of its conflicts. It would seem that each attempt to respond to past failures, have, linked as they were to the failings of succeeding systemic expectations, succeeded only in re-fighting new battles on old battlefields. In this way, it was the failures of particular solutions to otherness that were confronted, because of the expectation that the problems associated with them should be solvable, rather than the failure of the idea of a solution able to account for non-identity itself, rooted so heavily as it is in Western culture.

In a sense past errors were even naturalized—they were seen as reflecting a state of ignorance that was somehow inevitable within the determinants of the solution itself—because necessary to bring it about. Thus successive systems only succeed in basing themselves on the very points on which their predecessors were vulnerable or with which they were unable to contend, and so were established on a progressively more restricted foundation in terms of the position that each respective solution allotted to man. They looked for a solution to otherness, then, by attaching it to the nature of something, i.e. man, whose scope was becoming more and more restricted. And when one looks at the figures, it is undeniable that in their respective worldviews, the subject "personally"—in terms of the role as human beings that they were thought to play in ultimately creatively engaging with what constructs human reality—diminished in tandem with the positing of each successive solution to the problem of otherness. Augustine argued that man would become one with God and was destined for a total reconciliation with all of existence; Petrarch conceived of man as like a God on Earth through his unique ability to draw something beautiful and true from nature; Rousseau saw man as bound by an achieved characteristic that he could form by virtue of his will and intellect; and Gobineau envisioned man and nature as one and the same through the ascribed characteristic of race. It is clear, then, when they are juxtaposed, that the figures reacted to each other's view of man and otherness through positing less ambitious roles for the subject.

And as the subject as agent entirely disappeared from their analyses so did the capacity of thought to recognize and appreciate otherness, because the source of otherness, of respect for the object, is an attribute of man himself. This can be seen in that for each of the figures what man was taken to be was carried over into their conceptions of nature. As otherness depends for its existence on the recognition of a subject, so the subject's progressive restriction must lead to a completely restricted view of nature, i.e. the distance between man and nature will itself diminish as they both become more mundane. For Augustine nature was the divine ideas made manifest which man would literally reconcile himself to in the City of God; Petrarch's idealism envisioned nature as a chaos utterly distinct from man's creative activity; Rousseau saw nature as an ordered material harmony to which man could correspond by realising that it was akin to the structure of his own soul; and in Gobineau's racialism man and nature effectively mirrored each other so completely that they were both without agency and so were passive. Each figure's view of man's potential, like that of nature itself, becomes more self-evident and less mysterious. It became less opaque the more it became what man already took himself to be. The "salvation" that man can hope to achieve through discovering himself lessens as otherness is also progressively displaced. More that exists thus comes to be seen as inconsequential to man's actual existence or as pointless because unsolvable within the confines of the system. The part of reality that counts for man becomes an ever more restricted version of the vision of what man himself is. Western history in this sense can be seen as the collapse from Augustine onward of lesser and lesser reconciliations between man and nature. It is as if otherness fights back against man by withdrawing as he attempts to encompass it through his systems. But of course, what is happening here is that the sphere of life which is seen as approachable by man recedes as he loses agency. And the parallel movement to this loss of agency, nature's restriction, shows, if anything does, the connection that exists between man and externality. As in the downward trajectory of the modern subject identified by the Frankfurt School, the subject who can seemingly control more but only through the loss of his agency and at the expense of fooling himself into thinking that he has captured nature through a structure that can only imprison him, so the figures that I examined lost any claim to an authentic agency in tandem with the erosion of their perspective on what man could really do with nature. This occurred as they came to see themselves and nature as confined within the dictates of a structure thought to definitively solve, and therefore restrict, what man was taken to be. They equated agency with control, in the sense

of having a definitive or closed and completed relationship with nature as being the end goal of human activity.

Without a doubt also, as I have shown, all the figures, these intensively creative men who were indisputably responsible for transformative revolutions in Western thought, did so through history. Like ontology, history is a world unto itself, and as such, can provide the impetus for creating both an ideal thought world and worldviews or ideologies.⁵⁶⁷ History as a locus for revisiting otherness beyond particularity, I again contend, was truly a space for creating ideologies capable of offering solutions to otherness.⁵⁶⁸ The indisputably transformative nature of their thought is proof of their creative use of the past. In this sense the use of history by the figures is central to this study because it has served a dual purpose as both a space upon which to exercise their own creative subjectivity through the appreciation of otherness that it makes possible, and at the same time, as a means of constraining man through the construction of comprehensive worldviews, which their successive attempts to define man's "nature" have enabled.

As this work has tried to demonstrate, the awareness of a world preceding one's own existence is, I believe, the most fundamental way of acquiring an understanding of a world exceeding one's existence and so of the non-identity necessary for creativity and human life itself. Perhaps all human thought can be traced to a central idea that the world "exists," and perhaps this constitutes its "miracle" the ability to give autonomy to the world beyond one's own conceptions of it. In this way agency, or creativity, can be seen as co-dependent with reason, the ability to work within an ontology. Anyone can tautologically demonstrate how the worldview

⁵⁶⁷ History is developmental in that it possesses a reality of causation and change in its narrative and content that extends it implicitly beyond the individual object, thereby necessitating the integration of concepts, or alternately, their creation, to allow for the object with which historical consciousness is preoccupied to function historically. You could never arrive at the history of an object or situation by simply projecting it into the past in isolation from other objects or situations as this would make no sense and would be a history of nothing; nothing would happen and it would be pointless and inconceivable.⁵⁶⁷ While history is a creative space that, in a sense, can never be entirely taken away for the reasons stated, at the same time it is implicitly creative in the same way that concepts are: history is relational, it necessarily builds its own world, and it mirrors what ontology necessitates.

⁵⁶⁸ If the concept is integrative, if it refers to a web of meaning, its distinguishing characteristic is the inability of its content to be ever grounded in self-evident experience as obtained through one's physiological associations with the external world. The content of the concept in itself is nothing but a reference to a seemingly endless series of associations to other meanings, without which it would be unusable and clearly not creatable. Just as Collingwood argued that historical consciousness was different from a sensory immediacy, in the sense that it impelled one to think of the causes of past actions, so reflecting on history conveys a world and must be engaged with as a world, must extend itself, just as is the case with concepts, to build a cohesive and interlinked world, its own world, and so lends itself to the creation of an ontology.

of an individual is shaped by that which comes before them, but the fact that something can merely be shown to result from the past by no means suffices to demonstrate that it was inevitable. Such a supposition relies on a circular argument by presupposing that agency or something like it does not exist, yet as I have attempted to show the "discoveries" of these men, which were of course a result of an existing ontology, nonetheless took the form that they did only because of subjectivity. It is no coincidence that the past, as a place that is definitively other and that can only be experienced through the mediation of the subject, was the venue by which all the figures arrived at and presented their novel and creative visions of man. And history for the figures that I examined was likewise not just a means of projecting solutions to contemporary problems but also of locating the authentic form of selfhood that they felt to be lacking in their own time; it acted as a venue in which to fill a sense of emptiness or lack of meaning. They all felt as if they ought to have been born in earlier days and imagined themselves in time's past. History was synonymous with the operation of the cause and solution to otherness, history began with the appearance of this thing and would end with its disappearance: obedience/disobedience, the self, the social, and the racial. For them the past was not merely a place to look to for the origin of a problem, as one might expect, but rather, and this is what I am trying to emphasize, was seen as embodying a problem-free state, a sort of salvation, to which man could return. While the former might be a normal characteristic of human thought, the preponderance of the latter in the West and its unnaturalness betrays Augustine's legacy. In search of authenticity, they projected their own respective views of "natural" man—man as he should be—onto a primordial past and traced man's successive "falls"—the origin of non-identity—to an action of man in the past. In history, in its place for difference, they found a space capable of providing an answer, in the form of a model of behaviour or way of being that could be looked back to, and so given reality as a conception for the future. They found in history a place that seemed to allow for a means of escaping contemporary aporias.

They all saw themselves and were viewed by those around them as exceptional men. They felt out of place in their respective contemporaneities, they were afflicted by a profound sense of alienation, by a sort of anguish or existential angst. They were disgusted or at odds with their fellow men, and they saw them as degenerated or as lacking "reality." These figures—even Gobineau to an extent, as we saw—also claimed to have had a sort of conversion experience, an

intensely personal life transforming encounter with what each took to be his real or authentic nature, with the solution to otherness which before this time had gone unnoticed. Whether these episodes were fabricated or not, it is significant that each thought it necessary to include such an event in their intellectual development because it demonstrates that for them it was authenticity that was the factor above all thought to be lacking in their own lives and sociohistorical contexts. But it is not impossible, given their idiosyncratic personalities, that these experiences really did happen or were a way of conveniently encapsulating the results of lengthier inner struggles. And one and all, they explained or sought to come to terms with their moment of "conversion," of epiphany, by looking back to the past. Augustine looked to the fall of Adam and Eve to understand his own total surrender to God in the Garden; Petrarch's mind turned back to the ancient world to understand the importance of his own self after his ascent of Mount Ventoux; Rousseau used man as he imagined him in the State of Nature to explain the deceptions of society revealed on the road to Vincennes; and Gobineau following the Revolutions of 1848 came to associate authenticity with a racial character betrayed by a primordial miscegenation.

For this reason, all of the figures also perceived themselves as living in a time of decline when life had ceased to be meaningful or worthwhile, during which the degeneration that resulted from this fall could be exposed, and so the solution to otherness put into stark relief by virtue of the very fact that men had failed to adhere to it. Since all error was believed solvable, decline could not be taken in any other way but as an indication of its remedy and for the same reason each successive system had to see itself as wholly new and unprecedented, as completely detached from their predecessors and so as untainted by their past corruption. They, likewise, envisioned the past as immersed in ignorance as to the true nature of human reality and saw history itself as a sort of autonomous process working toward a predefined end as guided by a transhistorical factor. This final state would necessarily permit no transient element. It would be unchanging and unassailable in every sense of the word, a true end of history, of life as it had been, whose comprehensiveness once discovered demanded total and unyielding commitment on the part of the faithful. In this way their historical efforts should be envisioned as forms of creative destruction; they discovered new ways of being but ultimately used creativity, in the form of history, against itself in their obsession with and belief in the legitimacy of constructing universal theories of life and human behaviour.

Modernity and Augustine's Legacy

All the figures alike, then, were attempting to solve non-identity, indeed were obsessed with it. They were searching for authenticity and meaning, and their solutions contained the same features; they employed the same means of solving it, and so became trapped in each other's problematics. Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this work of how to account for modernity's peculiar orientation to otherness can we not detect a faithful reproduction, indeed even a culmination, of the pattern that we have traced in this essay? We have reviewed Gobineau's motivations for attaching men so fervently to a transcendental, to something taken as wholly natural and so incontestable, in the problem of group conflict within society. These transcendentals had made people little more than the playthings of history. Even if Gobineau himself would not have sanctioned such views, his ideas when taken to their furthest implication would serve to justify as inevitable and necessary every action that could advance humanity towards its envisioned end, no matter how grotesque or horrifying. The totalitarian systems of the twentieth century that would base themselves upon submission to these transcendentals were expansionary and all-encompassing because they were premised on an assured belief in their possession of the answer to every question. And as such, there was no room for spontaneity or creativity in totalitarian societies (Arendt 1973: 438). Acknowledging the limitations of one's thinking in such a system became impossible or even irrelevant because the human world had to be seen as structured around the fixed dictates of the party or movement that claimed to have aligned itself to the transcendental responsible for all human activity.

Under such a perspective anything was deemed permissible. All became equally disposable, when set against the imperative of aligning reality with the transcendental, since in a completely objectified fashion totalitarian movements always claimed to know the end result of every action. In a sense in acknowledging no outside, the totalitarian states reverted to the immediacy of the beasts, but with all of the tools of conceptual thought and human discovery available to man, which in the original instance depend on a respect for otherness. The life of the individual and the entirety of human knowledge similarly had to be completely structured around the transcendental so as to eliminate any alternatives to the total domination on which its claims to legitimacy rested and were perpetuated. And so emerged the totalitarian system of government which relied on the total mobilization of its followers and on their constant self-

monitoring as effected by a police state through fear of contravening the demands of an apparatus which claimed to be the mouthpiece of the transcendental (Arendt 1973: 473). The ultimate consequence of this attempt to impose a system so comprehensively on life, of this total disrespect for otherness, through viewing oneself as the instrument of history, as with Hitler and the other Nazi leaders at the end of the Second World War, was that it was actually deemed preferable to commit suicide rather than to survive. This was because the world itself appeared obviously flawed, unreal, and unnatural as it had somehow failed to conform to the totalitarian ideology which, even in defeat, was still assumed to be inescapably true (Arendt 1973: 357).

To an extent, of course, all of the theories reviewed in this work had aspects in common with the totalitarian movements, but, as we saw with Gobineau, none had such a passive view of man nor a less ambitious, less redemptive, goal for him. They simply advocated for the continuation or perpetuation of a mundane status quo, i.e. a repetition or culmination of whatever was already taken to constitute human activity. And it was this passive view of man and nature when juxtaposed to the awesome transhistorical shaping force of the transcendentals to which they were thought attached, that made totalitarian movements, on the hand, so successful and, on the other, so destructive. Gobineau's attempt to link culture completely to race seems almost laughable today. As we examined, he viewed culture as a sort of harmonious totality, as a working out of a highly deterministic system in which every element creates binding conditions for whatever follows it, in which everything builds on every other thing, is intertwined and enables every other irrespective of any external interference in a closed and self-constituting system, that men are automatons who merely exhaust the possibilities of whatever their racial composition allows. Yet, in his own mind he was an idealist in the purest sense of the term. He believed that he was resisting the objectivist tendencies of the modern world in favour of a concentration on a individualist spirit or folk value capable of rising above all. Gobineau's ideas are interesting because within them we find the combination of idealism and objectivism which Adorno argued were indistinguishable in their implication. In Gobineau man can both rise above all and at the same time is entirely bound to a transcendental which controls him. We see in him the paradox which underpins modernity laid bare in a completely unabashed way, i.e. man who thinks that he is in control of himself yet by virtue of this is controlled by his creations. At the same time we can detect the failures of an objectivism which cannot even account for the basis

of its own conceptions of the world, of the unnaturalness of human thought and so of the need to place its point of origin within a creative act of the subject.

For Gobineau, in whose theory we can detect a supreme representative of alienation, the displacement of externality or non-identity to the realm of absolute other coincides with the complete loss of the subject's agency through the denial of his existence. And is not the view that there is a part of man that exceeds or is more real than reality itself, as is essential to the universalizing theories championed by Augustine and his successors, through its removal of a subject capable of appreciating the world's otherness beyond one's own existence, since there must be a part of man capable of conforming to the transcendental, not ultimately fated to destroy or ultimately deny the subject itself? Since, as this work has attempted to show, the agency of the subject depends on otherness and otherness, for its recognition, on a subject, the attempt to remedy what Adorno termed non-identity through emphasizing the subject's conformity to a particular system or mode of existence, depicted as having the answers to all of life's conflicts and perplexities, will eventually result in the erosion of both otherness and agency, subject and object. This would be the result because, as discussed in the introduction, the recognition of otherness depends on man and man as a subject depends on that recognition.

Learning from the Past: Solving the Unsolvable

Is the attempt to solve otherness through the view of man and the world outside him that has been discussed above, not then just the most recent intellectual component and continuation of a tendency toward a "fall" in the place attributed to man in Western culture as a subject capable of appreciating non-identity? While no doubt examining only a niche in intellectual history, a series of historical vignettes, has this project not at the very least identified an approach to otherness that was a counterpart, perhaps even a predecessor or progenitor, to the rationality that predominates in modernity and which the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school criticized so vociferously? Is it not the legacy of a much older and more fundamental way of thinking which received its original articulation and impetus during the time of Augustine and whose forward movement can be discerned, among other ways, through the creative, but nonetheless increasingly restrictive use of history made by the figures that this work has examined? And have the systemizing historians reviewed in this project not also, subtly and

unbeknownst to themselves, despite creatively reaching back through history, only succeeded in echoing, and moreover exaggerating, his ideas about the fall of man and human redemption? Has this not led to the result that the role enjoyed by the subject in each of the respective visions of history examined—his ability to engage with the material—has declined along with the expectation that he can influence it, as has his capacity to appreciate an otherness that cannot be eliminated? And along with this has thought itself not become increasingly shut in on itself and so actually, and in a more obvious fashion, unable to deal with or to account for itself? Can we not see through this idiosyncratic yet highly influential facet of intellectual history where this sort of human triumphalism and exceptionalism ultimately leads? Can we not see through the example provided by this project the ultimate consequence for the subject of the search for definitive answers and from this its effect on otherness itself. Has not a creeping objectivism/idealism characterized Western thought since Augustine whereby the world/man has been taken to exist on their own, in a self-contained fashion?

In this light we can perhaps see that as the subject entirely disappears from the analysis, so does the capacity of thought to recognize and appreciate otherness, because the source of otherness—respect for the object—is an attribute of man himself. And at the same time, the ability to critique the problems that emerge from neglecting otherness, the inevitable problems that accompany human limitations, also disappear. This is even to the extent, I suggest, that the modern subject when taken to its logical conclusion could even lack the capacity not just to work with but even to merely recognize that there is a problem. A system of thought that tries to remove man in order to deal with his limitations, because of its expectation that it is within his potential to discover a system capable of redeeming him, and that this is what constitutes legitimate human activity and ambition, will proportionately be unable to even recognize and so deal with otherness. Since it is man himself who alone is capable of appreciating and coming to terms with non-identity, the contradictions and blind spots that always overshadow thought will not be able to be dealt with if his creative capacity to work with otherness is removed or deemphasized. And perhaps we can detect an undeniable parallel here to the dehumanization engendered by the objective sciences and the modern consumer society bent so radically as they are on eliminating the subject. Perhaps this has rendered knowledge progressively detached from human purposes as its creation by people has become harder to conceive and so they more incidental to its imperatives. We can see, then, through this work's own creative use of history,

the obviousness of the failure of Augustine's attempt to solve the problem of otherness through elevating a system over man. And we can also see in his attempt to solve this problem through man's conformity to this system, the interdependent link that exists between the subject, otherness, and thought's viability.

And so, as discussed at the beginning of this work, as thought is evidently dependant on non-identity for its origin and continuing viability it becomes unable to actually deal with itself in the absence of otherness. The continual striving for security in a system that tries to restrict the role that man plays in his world, which I have attempted to highlight through these major figures and their conceptions of history, can lead nowhere else but to the inability to deal with problems and so to the search for ever more encompassing systems that in turn lead to man's further erosion as a subject capable of engaging with otherness. The interdependence of man, as a subject with agency, and otherness is "proven" by their progressive erosion in the figures discussed throughout this work and by their elimination as shown above. My own problematic, in turn reveals the centrality of man and otherness for a creative agency and for thought's viability. I believe, then, that the origin of the types of thought against which critical theory has reacted, as well as their problems as identified in the introduction, have been "solved" when they are viewed as the culmination of Augustine's attempt to respond to otherness by restricting man's action. Such an expectation in attempting to conform the subject to a system of thought in order to achieve the aim of capturing reality as it is, and so of coming to terms with the non-identical, will lead to the erosion of the capacity for activity capable of respecting the object, and so of human agency itself.

And, consequently, it follows from all of its failings that in our reaction to our own contemporary aporias, when we fight again on the battlefield of our predecessor by critiquing its particularities, it is now against the idea of universalizing theories and all their problems and shortcomings. Has this not revealed, unbeknownst to itself, through its total exclusion of externality and simultaneous denial of man, that non-identity really is absolutely other, i.e. that it cannot be solved, and yet that man as a subject depends on this failure. In a sense, otherness becomes what it really was all along, wholly other and unencompassable, just as man becomes nothing in himself. The figures that we reviewed with their progressive restriction of man's purview really were moving in the right direction, and we can now use this to positive effect. In this light, otherness would be revealed not so much as simply caused by man, as the figures

surmised, but as nevertheless uniquely able to be appreciated by him and so as depending on him for its recognition and so existence in a very real sense. This is perhaps what Walter Benjamin labelled the "wish image," the desire to respect the object which implicitly accompanies the subject's awareness of it.

Otherness is a product of man's inability to understand what he himself is; man's "problems" do reflect the subject's incapacitation. The world really is perfect in a sense. Error does arise from man, but owing to his inability to understand his dependence on otherness for his own existence, to his perception of non-identity as a problem rather than as something to be valued and respected. And by the same token man is shown to really be "nothing," to have no subjectivity, when he dehumanizes others by using them as a means to an end or forgets the inherent externality of nature. Examining the historical process that resulted in this shows the way in which man and otherness were restricted. Through seeing the effects of their absence we can in turn also discover why they are needed, thereby enabling an understanding of the interdependence of the two. And we can arrive at this understanding not by naively pretending that we have made a clean break with the past, as the proponents of totality do, but with the sincere awareness that we are a product of it and perhaps with a positive or helpful, even if not definitive, implication. We like Augustine, can tell a story via history of a fall and redemption in the Western tradition, in this case of otherness and man. At the same time we can also acknowledge that history has consistently been used as a means of trying to come to terms with otherness and of alleviating the contemporary problems that accompany it and thought more generally.

For Adorno a solution to externality was never needed to end man's anxieties concerning it. All that was required was an acknowledgment of otherness and the respect for the object that it brings. Immediacy or authenticity, Adorno believed, the aim of so much Western philosophy, was not only not possible and not desirable but not even needed to end alienation, just respect for the mystery of the object. "If the alien were no longer ostracized, there hardly would be any more alienation" (Adorno 1990: 172). Like modern man, all the figures examined in this work were driven by their own fears and anxieties. They sought agency, yet their own idea of what constituted it became less and less ambitious as they got trapped within the dictates of their respective systems. Their failures reveal another conception of agency, the one that Adorno discussed, that of humility before the object as means of ending alienation. This would be an

agency not besought by a paralyzing fear of what it does not know, but one characterized by a healthy caution and respect for what it realizes is ultimately beyond its understanding. It would prioritize self-reflection. It would realize that the full implications of what it does can never be known, and so take care when considering what it does. It would recognize that solutions or answers to its fears are always just provisional, but from this would draw a hidden power by realizing that existence is always more than it seems and that one's own activity as an agent, rather than just as a subject immersed in ontology, depends on this recognition. And through this it would, above all, always endeavour to leave a space for otherness in its own conception of the world, a space for engaging with it through acknowledging that it is inextricable. A lack of universality thus would be the only universal, and it would moreover be something on which the subject actually depends.

In this respect the writings of the figures described in this work can be seen as akin to the parable of the blind men and the elephant. Each was obsessed with non-identity, wanted to solve it, to come to terms with the subject-object divide by reconciling themselves to otherness by finding an authentic subjectivity, but failed to realize that the solution to the non-identical was before them all along in the form of otherness itself. Otherness here is shown to be something not to be feared, but to be valued as essential for our existence as human beings with agency. We must try to escape from the web within which the Western mind has been so entangled since Augustine by realizing that otherness is not a problem, not because it effectively does not exist, but because it is essential. The freedom of the object and the subject thereby emerge as residing in the same process. It is not within man, not in a solution to the human problem that man can discover himself, but in bringing externality itself to prominence. Man must move past his fixation on himself and into "reality," into a larger world, through a profound and unprecedented, ethical and epistemological, openness to externality, through realizing that the basis of his own selfhood depends on otherness. And history, by the same token, can now perhaps be used in the creative fashion envisioned by Benjamin, not to react to the problems caused by man's restriction, not against its own creative potential, but as a place to imagine new possibilities, to freely develop every aspect, every facet, of what a given sociohistorical formation makes possible. And so it has also become possible to realize, by virtue of its importance and the revealing of its characteristics, that history itself, while among its vehicles, is only one of the guises of the non-identical, merely one aspect of a more fundamental need and attribute of the

human story. A story that not just depends on a world made by others, or on a world of difference, but more fundamentally, for its actual creation and continuing viability, on the recognition itself of difference, of the autonomy of and respect for others, and of a nature capable of transcending one's own expectations.

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